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SPELL-BOUND.

VOL. I.

SPELL-BOUND.

BY

ALICE KING,

AUTHOR OF

"QUEEN OF HERSELF,"

"THE WOMAN WITH A SECRET,"

&c., &c.

"All that is healthily pleasant, is useful."

HENRY MORLEY.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



LONDON:

HURST AND BLACKETT, PUBLISHERS,

13, GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET.

1874.

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251. b. 351.

LONDON:
PRINTED BY MACDONALD AND TUGWELL, BLENHEIM HOUSE,
BLENHEIM STREET, OXFORD STREET.

SPELL-BOUND.

CHAPTER I.

MISS VELLEMBIE'S SCHOOL.

IT was half-past twelve on a drowsy noon towards the end of August. The bees hummed dreamily over the dry, thirsty garden turf. The flowers breathed out languidly their scent. The trees hung down their heads wearily. The sun winked faintly through a curtain of light haze. The sea sounded as if it were singing itself to sleep. Even the noise of the busy town near at hand seemed to-day hushed and muffled.

But though all was drowsy out of doors, everything was quite the contrary within the walls of Golden Mount, which was the name of Miss De Vellembie's fashionable boarding-school for young ladies, and which stood close to the well-known watering-place of Rotherport, on the sunny shores of South Devon.

A bell rang sharply and imperiously, telling the establishment it was half an hour to dinner. The pupils trooped out of the class-room, some chattering nonsense, some laughing at nothing, some dancing their newest steps, some singing snatches of naughty little fast songs they had learned from their brothers last holidays. The teachers hurried up to their bed-rooms and smiled slyly, as they stood before their glasses primly arranging their dress, at the thought of the prohibited French novel hid-

den among decorous folds of brown silk in the drawer hard by. The housemaid left off the careless washing of silver spoons, and the diligent flirtation with the knife-boy which she had been carrying on through the pantry window, and began to lay the cloth in a business-like manner. The awful form of the great De Vellembie herself was seen moving down the passage with her out-of-school-hour's face on, but with her black silk just as stiff, her figure just as upright, and her white lace cap just as crisp as usual. The good lady's features sometimes went out of uniform, but her figure never.

"Do let us go out into the garden, Monica," said one young lady to another. "It is so insufferably hot here, and the girls are so abominably noisy."

"Why, Stella, you are generally not

such an especial lover of silence. What makes your little ladyship so fastidious to-day?"

"I'm not fastidious, and I don't know what you mean," was the answer given somewhat sharply.

They put on their straw hats, which were hanging in the hall, and went out together. Monica made a few attempts at talking, but her companion only answered in monosyllables.

Stella Silverton was a very pretty little creature, of the Titania type of beauty. Her figure was lithe, her features were delicately cut, her dark eyes provokingly mischievous, and her small mouth provokingly saucy. Some people said that Miss Silverton looked like an Italian girl, and others admired her brilliant English complexion. Both were right, for though she

came of a good old Devonshire family, she had a strain of southern blood in her veins from her mother. She had passed sixteen, and was generally as bright as a sunbeam and as merry as a bird in Spring time. But at the present moment all the light was gone out of her face, and a shadow was there instead. Her friend noticed this change, but as in the last few weeks she had several times seen Stella in such moods, and as when she had asked her what was the matter, she had only got a short, unsatisfactory, rather snappish answer, she refrained from any further questions, thinking that the mystery, if mystery there was, would sooner or later come out of itself.

Monica Midhurst herself was no regular beauty, but a woman with a face which had a great deal of meaning. It was a clear, open face, and yet a face whose alphabet

of subtly varying expression it took a long time to learn thoroughly, a face to be remembered rather than to be admired, a face to be loved, and perhaps a little feared too. She was three years older than Stella, and her figure was much taller and more womanly. She was a teacher in the school, while at the same time she took lessons in some things herself.

When Monica found that Stella would hardly speak, she soon relapsed into silence. Monica was never a very great talker. Her thoughts often grew up so quickly that she could not at once find words to clothe them in. She liked to have time to fit the one neatly on to the other, and this was perhaps why she first got into the habit of writing down her ideas, which habit made her after a while form her earliest dim notion of being an authoress.

"I never felt such a disgusting heavy day in my life," cried Stella, suddenly rushing into a flow of words. "The air feels as if it was nothing but a distillation of lead. I declare my brains will be all squeezed out of my head by the mere weight of it."

"Do you think so, dear?" said Miss Midhurst, speaking as if Stella had just named the most commonplace and likely accident which could happen to a young lady's skull.

"Now, Monica, I know you didn't hear one word I said. You're thinking of the paper you are writing for that nasty old magazine. It's in your mind morning, noon, and night, and I'm quite sick of it and you too, that I am."

Monica reddened a little at the truth of this impeachment. She was beginning

to be an authoress in a small way, and like most of her trade was apt sometimes to be a long way off in thought from the people and things around her. She was about to excuse herself when the dinner bell recalled them to the house.

The girls crowded into the large dining-room. Pretty faces, plain faces, fair faces, dark faces, clever faces, dull faces, sweet faces, sour faces, faces which seemed as if they would one day have a story printed upon them, and faces which seemed as if they would never reflect anything but the quiet sunshine of life, gathered around the long table.. All looked spruce and bright with the exception of one young lady, with whom (either because she was a very naughty young lady, or a very careless young lady, or a very stupid young lady, or because she was by the malice of fate a

very ill-starred young lady) everything had gone wrong that morning, and who in consequence had a limp and flabby appearance, from the bow on the top of her head down to the hem of her dress.

The stately De Vellembie sat at the head of the table. The teachers were scattered about among the pupils, and were supposed to form living models for them of lady-like behaviour at meals.

“Stella, my dear, you don’t seem to have a good appetite to-day,” said Miss De Vellembie, glancing down the table to where Miss Silverton sat with a full plate before her, though everyone else had nearly finished.

With all her whale-bone and decorum, Miss De Vellembie was in the main a most kind-hearted lady, who liked to see her girls thrive in body as much as in mind.

Besides, Stella was her especial pet, partly because she was the beauty of the school, and partly because the girl had a way of creeping into everybody's heart.

"I don't like mutton," answered the young lady, pouting out her red lips.

"You don't like mutton, my dear! Why, it is declared by the medical faculty to be the most wholesome meat of which we can partake. It is—" Miss De Vellembie never lost an opportunity of improving her pupils—"it is digested thirty seven minutes more quickly than a boiled fowl. Besides, it is at once the most general and the most genteel of meats, being found at times on the table of both the prince and the peasant."

Stella made no answer to this long instructive speech, but only held down a slice of mutton firmly with her fork,

and cut it up spitefully into little bits.

"Well, if you really don't like mutton, my dear," went on Miss De Vellembie very blandly, "you can have some of the minced beef at the other end of the table. *Chacun à son goût*, you know. I need not, I think, explain to you, my love, the meaning of that neat and I may say suggestive French expression."

After that there was silence, except for a few private amusements which were carried on among the girls, and which the teachers, notwithstanding a whole broadside of frowns and severe glances, found it impossible quite to suppress. Now some half-dozen young ladies would watch with breathless interest a fly which buzzed round them, it having been settled between them that she near whose plate it first pitched, would be the first to be married. Now

several little feet would be busy under the table in active telegraphic movement. Now, Tilly Slapton, the most daring and reckless damsel of the school, would favour her neighbours with an exact representation (given for five seconds only, and not to be repeated) of Miss De Vellembie herself.

Dinner being over, Miss De Vellembie rose and said, "And now, young ladies, having fed our physical parts, we will, if you please, return to the feeding of our mental parts, which we will continue till we go out to take the air."

This little speech was always made by the good lady at the end of dinner. It was a form which came round as regularly as the ringing of the chimes in the church tower hard by. There was a tradition in the school that in very remote days Miss

De Vellembie had had a suitor in a neighbouring rector, and that, though she had rejected him, she had, in affectionate remembrance of him, retained this conceit about the physical and mental feeding, which she had culled from one of his sermons.

“Well done, old starch and chips,” whispered Tilly Slapton to the young lady who was her confidante and humble admirer and imitator. “Polly, you and I will run upstairs before lessons begin and have a little out of that bottle of currant wine which is hidden so nicely in our book-shelf behind the edition of what’s-his-name’s complete works. I mean the old boy who wrote something about a watch. Come along, Polly, let’s have a snack, as Cousin Harry calls it. Poor fellow, how awfully fond he is of me !”

Then the two ran off, mimicking as they went the faces the French teacher was making as she arranged her hair before the glass over the chimney-piece—a business with which Mademoiselle industriously filled up every spare moment.

The limp young lady was soon seated on a music-stool, with a master at her side remarkable for a vast display of watch-chain and whiskers, in which position, what with runs, shakes, and chords, she quickly became a very red and moist young lady. The students of natural history in the fly were swooped down upon by the German governess (a stalwart female, notable for the entangled state of her hair, and of her ideas in matters social and political), and carried off and set down to ten stiff pages of “The Thirty Years’ War.” The active little telegraph-

ing feet had to stay as still as mice while Alexander and his Greeks were marching to victory through the long sentences of Rollin.

“Stella, my dear,” said Miss De Vellembie, “you and Monica and I will now retire to my private room, for our weekly studies in geography and history—the two most delightful of all branches of learning. What can be more exciting than to follow on the well-poised wings of imagination over the map the adventurous mariner, as in his swift bark he flies across the heaving ocean from cape to island, and from island to continent? What can be more pleasing to the intellect than to contemplate the distinguished persons who stand out like—well, I may say like waxwork on the stage of history. Monica, my dear, you are always my memorandum-book; where did we leave off?”

"In geography I think we had just reached India, and in history I believe we were among the early French kings," answered Monica, speaking quite gravely, though a half smile was lurking in the corners of her mouth at the grand style of talk with which the good lady regaled her pupils. Monica Midhurst was too clever not to laugh at the oddities even of people she loved, as she did love kind Miss Vellembie. It was no doubt a fault, but it was rather that of her head than of her heart.

"Quite correct—yes, I remember—that is quite correct," said Miss De Vellembie, too much wrapt up in her "cloud of dignity" to see, or even to dream of as a far-off possibility, that mischievous hovering smile. "Monica, the man who has the good fortune to make you his wife will not only

marry a sweet, sociable, sympathetic companion, but he will also marry memory, mind, and matured meditation."

Miss De Vellembie was very fond of alliteration, and thought it a wonderful ornament to language.

"But suppose, dear Miss De Vellembie, I choose a single life, like yourself."

"Well, yes, it is true that I did choose a single life," answered the good lady, emphasizing very strongly the word "choose," and drawing herself up and smiling complacently. "On the whole, however, it is my opinion that if parents or guardians give a willing consent, and if everything is suitable as to family, and if there is the prospect of a comfortable competency (and of course none of my girls would think of matrimony without the blessing of her venerable papa and dear mamma, and

without the other etceteras I have named), on the whole, it is my opinion that a young lady had best enter the marriage state. But, Stella, my dear, I see you are getting impatient; you are longing to get to Catmandoo on the Bogmuttery, and to Clovis and Chilperic."

All this time Miss Silverton had been drumming on the floor with her feet, unravelling the threads at the end of the band around her waist, and crushing between her small white teeth a sprig of myrtle she had picked in the garden. When thus appealed to she could restrain herself no longer, not even in that awful presence. "I wish," she said, "Catmandoo, and all the other stupid old places with those disgusting long hideous names, had been turned upside down a thousand years ago; and as for Clovis and Chilperic, I wish they had

never been born, so that no books could have been written about them." Then she burst out crying and ran out of the room.

The look of utter dismay and horror with which Miss De Vellembie stared after her was so laughable that Monica could hardly keep in order those playful, flexible muscles around her mouth.

"Lord have mercy on us!" cried the elder lady, startled for a moment out of her dignity. "Is the girl gone mad? Is she going to have a brain-fever? Has she turned all at once into a wild Indian or a Chinese?"

Quickly however recovering herself, the school-mistress marched majestically towards the door. Then terrible would have been the storm which would have burst over the head of poor Stella, had not Monica boldly stepped forward to shelter her friend

before Miss Vellembie could leave the room. Though Miss Midhurst was the youngest teacher in the school, it was well known among the pupils that she had more influence with Miss De Vellembie than all the other governesses put together. The fact was that, though Monica sometimes smiled in her sleeve at Miss De Vellembie, and though Miss De Vellembie sometimes lectured Monica, the two really loved and respected each other. With a mixture of a little good sense, a little gentle coaxing, and much neat tact, Monica contrived after a while to smooth her old friend's ruffled dignity, and to get her to forgive naughty, little, incomprehensible Stella.

CHAPTER II.

MISS VELLEMBIE MEETS A STRANGER.

THE order of the day, or rather of the evening, after tea at Golden Mount was in Summer exercise. All the teachers walked out with the girls ; but the great De Vellembie herself spent that hour apart, employed no one knew exactly how, though there were in the school a number of myths about the matter.

On the evening in question Miss De Vellembie stood at the open window watching the girls (who, as they defiled along the garden path, looked, with their many-colour-

ed draperies and complexions of every shade, very like a troop of the brightest hot-house flowers going out to visit their humbler sisters in lane and woodland), and giving all in turn such parting counsels as these :

“ Miss Slapton, keep in mind always as you walk elegance and propriety.”

“ Miss Hockims, take care of the shoulders.”

“ Miss Glennie, reflect as you go as much as possible on Charlemagne.”

Having thus done her duty to the utmost point, the good lady sat down nominally to read Bishop Bull's sermons, but really to take a nap. After she had dozed for a little while, she got up, yawned and stretched herself, very like a most common-place sleepy middle-aged lady, but not at all like the dignified representative of all the

nine Muses in school hours. The evening was so fine that she thought she would take a stroll, and so, putting on her walking things, she went out.

Miss De Vellembie was fully her state-ly self again the moment she was beyond her own threshold. She might meet the relation of a pupil, or even the girls themselves, coming back. It would no more do for her than for Tilly Slapton to forget the proprieties. She sailed down the High Street of Rotherport without vouchsafing a single glance either to the golden glories of a jeweller's window or to the sweetest thing in bonnets. Now a carriage rolled by with a Bishop's livery outside, and, inside, a gentleman whose eyes twinkled in a rather unepiscopal manner. Now a bride in all the splendours of the honeymoon filled up the pavement, follow-

ed by her bridegroom, who looked very much as if he was thinking of running away. Now a stout butler, coming from the railway, with five travelling bags on one arm, and seven rugs on the other, groaned over the wants of womenkind on a journey. Here, a dreary-looking female, with a yet more dreary-looking poodle on a string, came out from a doorway. There, a troop of young ladies, led by the old riding-master on his white Arab (the best-known figure in the place), cantered merrily along. A German band was playing the Olga waltz, a peal of church-bells was jangling, a blind man was reading aloud with his fingers, an Italian organ-boy was grinding poor Mozart to death. There was plenty of life, and stir, and sound in the Naples of South Devon.

All this, however, seemed, to Miss De

Vellembie rather vulgar. In Winter, when the town was full of invalids wrapped in furs, it appeared to her a place of some sentiment. But at this season she could never find in the streets anything which was not below her refined taste. So she left the town, and turned up the deep lane, where the air was full of the wild thyme's pungent scent, and the honeysuckle's more languid odour. The worthy lady walked along in "maiden meditation," trying to make belief that she was thinking of Sir Isaac Newton; though out of every minute her mind was fixed for ten seconds on the great astronomer, and for fifty on calculating what meat would be wanted for to-morrow's dinner.

Her thoughts ran in this way :

"Sir Isaac Newton was indeed an eminent benefactor to the human race. I like

to see a leg of mutton on the table. It is always a genteel-looking joint. It would be quite sure to be enough, with a veal-pie and a beef-steak, if it were not for the German governess. He lived in constant communion with the celestial orbs. It is really a misfortune in a well-conducted household when a young woman has such an uncertain appetite. One day she will dine on salad, and the next she will eat, in five minutes, half-a-dozen thick slices of meat. There is something quite unlady-like in such a way of going on. I don't know whether I ought to dismiss her for it. What a privilege it must have been to have conversed with him! No English lady ever behaved so at meals. It makes all exact calculation about meat quite impossible. I suppose, after all, it must be a saddle, and not a leg. His study must

have been a sanctuary of learning. Science must have wrapped him in an ethereal cloud, in which he—— Goodness gracious me! I have only just remembered the piece of prime roasting beef which has been hanging up in the larder since last Friday. A woman in my position need have the heads of Queen Semiramis, Queen Boadicea, and Queen Elizabeth, all put together.”

“I beg your pardon, ma’am, but can you tell me where Golden Mount is?” said a gentleman who was coming down the lane, and who stopped Miss De Vellembie with this question.

The school-mistress started, thus disturbed in her musings, and glanced quickly at the speaker. He was a strongly built young man of about twenty-three, with a frank open face, out of which the

blue eyes shone fearlessly, as though to say we will look into everything; and the lips smiled merrily, as though to say we will enjoy everything; and over which the broad forehead arched proudly, as though to say I will understand everything.

There was nothing in the stranger (for such he was to Miss De Vellembie) to frighten a lady whether young, middle-aged, or old, but the mere fact of a young gentleman asking where Golden Mount was, made him at once an object of suspicion to the school-mistress's Argus mind. There must be something behind here, she thought. I must be at once on the watch and on my guard.

"Do you mean a large house which has been for some years a fashionable seminary for young ladies in Devonshire?" asked she.

"Yes, that is the place I want to find. The people at the railway station said it was in this direction. Could you be so kind as to tell me the shortest way to it."

"If you will walk on with me a little I am going this way and will show you the turn up to it," said Miss De Vellembie, resolved to find out what this meant.

"The name of the old lady who keeps the school is Parchment, or something like that, isn't it?" asked he as they went along.

"No, sir; De Vellembie, Miss De Vellembie."

"Oh, well, Parchment and Vellum are very much alike," laughed he; "either name would suit her, I should think, for she is a dry old chip, isn't she?"

The talk was taking a too personal turn Miss De Vellembie felt, and so to change

it, and at the same time to try to find out more about the stranger's designs, she said,

"I know the parents of many of the young ladies at Golden Mount school. If you have a sister whom you wish to place there, I can most conscientiously recommend it."

"Well, no, I have no sister," answered the gentleman, pulling his moustache.

"No doubt, then, you have a near relation among the pupils. May I ask which of the young ladies it is? I know many of them, and some are charming girls."

"I am not exactly—that is—I mean to say—the fact is I merely want to go to Golden Mount, to see the view from it;" and the young man twirled round a little coin which hung from his watch-chain, so industriously that it might have been

supposed to be the wheel of a tiny mill, which would grind for him the words of which he seemed to stand in no small need.

"There is a very fine prospect from Golden Mount over the bay," said cunning Miss De Vellembie, seeming not in the least to notice his embarrassment.

"Ah, yes, the bay. That is just what I want to see. It is such a wonderfully beautiful bay. With the evening light upon it, it must look quite like a Salvator—I mean like a Claude."

His words now came quickly enough, though from the way in which he uttered them he did not seem to know much about their meaning, and he had hardly done speaking when he fell into a well of absent thought, and stayed there for two or three minutes.

"Are you fond of the fine arts?" asked

Miss De Vellembie, at length breaking silence.

"The fine arts?" he said starting.
"Oh, yes, I have of course a great taste for lights and shadows, and all that sort of thing." Then after stopping for a few moments he went on in a tone which was much too elaborately careless,—“Do the girls at the school often go beyond the grounds, or won't the old drag—I mean the old lady, allow it?”

“I suppose just now I must have misunderstood you,” said Miss De Vellembie, keeping under her wrath with some difficulty. “I thought you meant to say that you wanted to go to Golden Mount for mere artistic motives, to see the view; but from your last words I gather that after all you wish to speak with some of the young ladies.”

"Oh no, you have quite mistaken my meaning. I simply asked whether the girls often came out, because I thought a few graceful young living figures would add a charm to inanimate nature. But just look what a lovely crimson tint there is in the West," and the young enthusiast of art gazed in that direction with an air which was meant to be very rapt, but was in reality rather foolish.

"Here is the turning," said Miss De Vellembie, who was glad it was reached. She saw that it would be vain to try to draw out of the young man anything more explicit about his object, and she was beginning (as everybody quickly does) to get very tired of having her ear turned to a speaker who was talking of herself and her belongings behind her back.

"Can I mistake the house?" asked he.

"It is the first on the right, and has a large garden."

"Thank you, I am so much obliged to you," and, with a low bow from the gentleman, and a stiff one from the lady, the two separated.

Miss De Vellembie had not misdirected the stranger. The road she had sent him did really lead to Golden Mount, but, had she liked it, she could have shown him a much nearer way. This, however, she reserved for herself. As soon as the young man was out of sight, Miss De Vellembie stepped over a stile which was near at hand, and crossed three fields with a nimbleness which would have done credit to her youngest pupil. The path brought her out close to her own gate. Inside this there was a little Summer-house, into which she went. Through the

leaves of the trees which were planted around the entrance she could see everybody who went to, or came from, the house without being seen herself; while through the Burmese fence, which on that side bounded the garden and formed the back of the arbour, she could both hear and observe all that might happen in the road. Here then she sat down to watch.

“Who can it be?” she thought, as she fanned herself with a volume of Pinnock she had in her pocket, and panted a little after her late hurried movements. “It can’t be any of the girls. They may all very likely have a cousin about whom their nurses may have put some nonsense into their heads, by telling them that they have read in their tea-cups that they are destined for each other; but none of the little chits would have the audacious impudence to

invite a young man to visit them here, that I am certain of. It can't be either of the maid-servants. He was too much of a gentleman for that. It must then be one of the teachers. But which of them can it possibly be? Not the Fräulein, for she is too much like a man herself for any man to care about her; not the Signora, for even if her black eyes were to get her a lover, her sallow cheeks would quickly frighten him away again; not my dear Monica, for I am certain that if she were thinking of being married, she would come at once and tell me of it, like the honest, straightforward girl that she is. It must be Mademoiselle. Her nose has not at all an aristocratic curve—indeed, it turns up; but then men don't care at all about that when a woman has a dancing, twirling way with her, as she has. I have noticed her

sometimes when the masters come into the room. Her head is never still. Oh! how horrible to think of my having fostered such a serpent in my house! And then to think of the poison she may have instilled into the dear innocent girls! But she shall march, the artful creature!—false hair, rouge, and all, she shall march!”

CHAPTER III.

STELLA'S SECRET.

STELLA SILVERTON had not gone out that evening with the other girls. Both yesterday and to-day she had complained of a headache, and stayed in alone. She must, however, certainly have found hair-dressing a perfect cure, since for the last half hour she had been sitting before her glass, busy with curls and plaits. At length, seeming from the smile she gave her own reflected face to be quite satisfied, she rose, and putting on jauntily her coquettish little hat, went out with a bright

colour in her cheeks, which was not exactly that of an invalid.

On reaching the road she paused, looked up and down it, and then began to walk to and fro, taking very short turns. Before long the stranger whom Miss De Vellembie had met came in sight. Stella's first impulse was to run to meet him with joy sparkling in every feature; but she restrained herself. "No," she thought, "I won't do that. He didn't come yesterday, and he has kept me waiting for him to-day. He shan't learn to think he is to be my lord in everything." So she turned towards the side from which the gentleman was coming, and began to pick ferns in the hedge.

"Stella, my star," said a voice close behind her.

"Oh! is it you, Mr. Oakleigh? You

have been so long in coming that I really had forgotten all about you." And settling her pretty mouth in a most confirmed pout, she turned very slowly round.

"Don't be angry, darling. I'm so ashamed if I've kept you waiting."

"Ashamed, indeed!" broke out Stella, who could not enact haughty silence for more than half a minute. "I should hope you are ashamed, and something more than ashamed. You are crushed, annihilated, I hope, when you consider all I have been going through for your worthless sake. I have been so cross for the last three weeks since I came back here, that the girls have hardly been able to live with me. I cried last night till three, so that this morning I looked quite a fright. I was so miserable that I could eat no marmalade for tea, though this was the day for it; and we

shan't have any more till next week. And this afternoon I actually told Miss De Vellembie herself that I wished Clovis and Chilperic had never been born."

"I really hardly remember who they were, but I don't think it would much have signified had your wish been fulfilled," said Mr. Oakleigh, composedly.

"Oh! Fred, you don't remember who they were? Why, all the girls in the third class know."

"Then when I come to Miss De Vellembie's school, as I must do before long if you don't leave it, I shall be put into the fourth class, I suppose. But don't let us waste our time talking about Clovis and Chilperic. Stella, darling, I have so much to say to you, and I have been so longing for a——"

"No, sir, nothing of that sort, if you

please," broke in the young lady. "You have been a naughty boy, and you are to be punished for it. There, cross that at your peril," and she threw down the long sprays of fern which she had been gathering, which fell in a wavy curve, forming a green fairy circle round her. "If you do, I will throw my apron over my face, and you shan't look at me any more to-day."

"What an awful threat!" he said, laughing, but looking rather as if in his inmost heart he really thought it so. "And now, Stella, do let me talk a little sense to you, or else, before I have spoken a word, one of the watch-dogs will be coming out to look for you."

"They are all out—even Miss De Vellembie. I watched her go down the garden from my window. But tell me, what have you to say to me, Fred?"

"In the first place, my uncle and I have quite made it up again."

"I am so glad. Then now I may tell Miss De Vellembie everything, and talk it all over with Monica, and ask my guardian's consent. I do so hate a mystery. I have felt these last few weeks as if I were afraid to let my friends look into my heart, because I knew that there was one dark corner in it."

"It was not the straightforward way of doing things which I like," said the young fellow, simply; "but then, my darling, what else could we have done for the time? I must either have given you quite up, or I must have told your guardian I wanted to marry you when I could not call a hundred a year my own. The worst of it is that even now I don't know whether he will let me have you, and whether, when

you have heard all, you will wish to come to me."

"Fred, what do you mean? How can you say such abominable things?"

"Now don't go off like a soda-water bottle, but listen to me. The reason, as you know, why my uncle quarrelled with me was that I would not choose either of what he called the three gentlemanly professions. I would not go into the Church because I did not like cramming school-children with indigestible cake, and yet more indigestible facts, and performing the part of a machine for the Squire's daughters to learn to flirt on. I would not be a barrister, because I had no taste for wading through a ploughed field. I would not enter the Army, because I did not care for a red coat and idleness."

"I don't wonder at the old gentleman's


being angry with you. I think you must be very stupid not to be able to do one of the things he wished. Consider how many things the girls at school can do."

"That's just the difference between men and women: most women like to do many little bits of various things, but a man likes to give his whole energy to one, and that he must love thoroughly. That is how it is women are often the best talkers, because they know a little of everything, and men the best doers."

"Women teach men how to do things, and then they do them. That is my way of interpreting your theory."

"The one thing to which I want to devote myself is nature. When I was a school-boy, I always found the fields and hedges much easier and more profitable books than those of the class-room. A

fly's wing had for me more meaning than a Greek character. A leaf seemed to me a more perfect poem than an ode of Horace. When I grew up, I understood by degrees that what I wished to be was a naturalist. But my uncle did not acknowledge such a profession. Who ever heard of an Oakleigh being a naturalist ? Perhaps some of my ancestors might have dabbled in such things, just by way of a pastime. That was all very well ; but the mere thought of one of their descendants making a profession out of that kind of light amusement, would certainly cause all of them to leap down from their picture-frames. My uncle bore with me for a time, calling it a boyish whim ; but when I still was restive, he flew at last into a passion, declared he would disinherit me, and forbade me his house. But you have heard all this before, Stella."



"Yes, I have heard it before ; but Monica says every man is so egotistical that the surest sign a woman can have of his liking her, is his telling her the same thing a hundred times over about himself or his work. As for your taste, I could never understand it any more than your uncle. I cannot imagine what pleasure you can find in picking up a poor unfortunate plant or insect, holding it under a microscope till it is dead, and then burying it between thick blotting-paper or in spirits of wine, and writing a hideously long name, which no one can spell or pronounce, for its epitaph."

"Don't speak disrespectfully of the microscope, because one day you may have to thank it for your silks and ribbons."

"You don't mean to try to make me believe that you are ever going to make any money by your old specimens and stuff."

“ You shall judge when you have heard what I am going to do. The government of one of the German states is about soon to send out a scientific expedition to the Amazon in South America. A friend of mine heard that a lower place in this party was not filled up. He told me of it; I hurried abroad and offered myself, and partly through good testimonials, partly through good luck, I got the post. I wrote to my uncle to tell him what I was going to do. When he found that natural history could, after all, bring in a good salary (he always worshipped gold next to rank, you know), and when he heard that the great-grandfather of the professor who leads the expedition was a Count of the German Empire, he relented, his heart began to soften a little on learning that I was going on so long a journey, and

he sent for me to come to him. I have been with him for the last three days, and we have quite made it up again. I should have come here yesterday, only I could not well get away sooner from him, and I thought, as I said in my letter you might expect me either evening, you would not care."

"And did you tell your uncle that we—I mean did you name me to him?" She blushed and stammered, but her eyes met his softly, and one little foot was advanced across the fairy circle.

"I told him I had wooed and won the dearest and prettiest girl in England; and on hearing that you have a comfortable little fortune, and that Henry VIII. had condescended to cut off the head of one of your ancestors, he was delighted, and told me to bring you to him as his niece as soon as

possible. But, Stella," and now his manly voice shook with strong feelings, "Stella, can you make up your mind, so young and beautiful as you are, and so sure to have many lovers who could give you a happy English home, can you make up your mind to leave your friends and your guardian, and to go with me to this far-off land, to lead a life of wandering, and perhaps sometimes of hardship?"

"Frederick!" She said no more, but she was in his arms now, and had come there of herself.

He drew her down a narrow lane which branched off here from the wider road, and where they were less likely to meet people.

"Are many women going with the expedition?" asked she, when she had somewhat recovered herself."

"The professor's wife is going, and

two other ladies, all brave-hearted women, who will not be separated from their husbands. But tell me, my star, do you think your guardian will give his consent?"

"He will scold a little at first, I daresay. But he will consent at last, I know, when he hears how I love you—he has such a dear, kind old heart!"

"The expedition starts in two months. We shall have to be married quickly."

"I shall fix the wedding-day, sir, and everything else about it," cried she, with a return to her playful imperiousness. "One thing I am resolved upon, and that is that the bridesmaids shall wear blue, because it's so becoming to Monica."

"Why, I shall be jealous of this Monica by-and-by," said he, laughing.

"She is such a darling of a duck of diamond of a girl!"

"Quite divine, of course, all young ladies' friends are for three days and three quarters."

"Monica is a friend for years, not for days," she said earnestly. "When you know her, Fred, I hope she will be your friend too."

"Can we ever want any friend besides each other?"

"I can hardly answer that," she replied rather thoughtfully. Then in her former light tone she went on: "If it had not been for Monica saving me this afternoon from Miss De Vellembie's wrath, I should have had now to be sitting in the house, learning by heart a hundred lines of Racine. His heroines do talk to their lovers in such long lines! I wonder whether love-making was really like that in those days, Fred? It must have been horribly tiresome if it was."

"It is very jolly now-a-days, that's all I know," answered he, beaming down upon her with his honest, sweet-tempered eyes.

"I always hated the Amazon in geography lessons, because it has two other names, which I never could remember. It is so odd that the people who write school-books all seem to rejoice so wonderfully in long names and round-about descriptions." She spoke in one of these pretty unconscious lapses into the school-girl which were common with her, though her love had already made her a woman, and her hand kept time to her words with a little petulant movement.

"When you make that sort of motion with your hand, I always think you are so like a Southern woman."

"I am half one. Did I never tell you that mamma was a native of the south of

France? It was from her I got my fanciful foreign name. I was born on the shores of the Mediterranean, and lived there for three years, till papa died."

"I had no idea of that before. I see now where all your sparkle comes from. Have you any relations either abroad or in England, to whom we must make known our marriage, or who will be likely to object to it?"

"All my living relations—and those are only cousins—are settled in America, and not at all likely to trouble their heads about me."

"Then every ray of my star is all my own!"

CHAPTER IV.

STELLA IS FOUND OUT.

UNBOUNDED were the wrath and surprise of Miss De Vellembie in her hiding-place, when she found that the lady who came down the garden walk was not, as she expected, the French teacher, but Stella Silverton, her favourite pupil.

Through the back of the Summer-house she saw and heard all that went on between the lovers till they turned down the lane. Her idea of the fitness of things as a schoolmistress was, so to speak, quite thrown out of balance by one of her pupils

thus acting against all precedent. In the annals of Golden Mount, was there ever such a thing heard of as a girl who had hardly passed through the briery paths of the German irregular verbs, whose mind was still in a state of dim confusion about the order of succession of the Roman Emperors, whose deportment was by no means yet all that could be wished, presuming so much as to dream of her orange flowers? Then the way in which the courtship had been carried on, without (as Miss De Vellembie expressed it in her thoughts) having been blessed by one gleam from the benignant smile of parent or guardian, without one inquiry as to what society would think, without any observance of becoming forms. Yes, it was indeed very shocking and monstrous; yet still in the depths of the old maid's heart there were echoes

of memories and hopes and fancies from days gone by which pleaded for little Stella.

Miss De Vellembie was, however, too much a woman of duty to let these latter softer feelings influence, for the present at least, her outward conduct. After the pair in the road were gone from her sight, she made up her mind as to what she would do. She would go down the walk which on that side of the large garden ran parallel with the lane the two had turned into, and passing out by a small gate which was there in the fence, would pounce suddenly upon them.


Meanwhile the unsuspecting lovers sauntered to and fro. The talk flowed on between them like a brook in Spring-time. The more they said the more they wanted to say. Each answer given by the one

seemed to make a new question start from the lips of the other.

"Do you hear how that blackbird repeats the same sweet note over and over again, Stella?" said Oakleigh. "I am sure he must be telling his mate how he loves her, for he never seems weary of it. Don't you think—but, oh! worse luck, there is some one coming," and the two started asunder, as though impelled by a spring.

"It is Miss De Vellembie!" cried Stella. "Fred, let us go and meet her, and tell her all at once."


"What! is that Miss De Vellembie?" exclaimed he, recognising in a moment the lady who had shown him the way. "Oh! the devil, then I'm off!" and with the ignominious cowardice of his sex in such emergencies, Mr. Oakleigh scrambled over the hedge, and hurried away under cover



of it, while the words, "Dry old chip!" and "Old dragon!" rang in his ears, making very unpleasant music.

Poor Stella looked after him, speechless from excess of wonder. Could he ever have seen Miss De Vellembie before? Why should he run away from her? What could make him all at once behave so badly to herself? What was she now to do?

She was still staring blankly at the spot in the hedge where her lover had disappeared, and these questions were still whirling indistinctly around her brain, when the schoolmistress came up. A third person might have found the whole situation ridiculous enough, though, had he looked at the faces of the two ladies, he would have seen that with them, at all events, it was no laughing matter.



"Stella," said Miss De Vellembie, who felt that she was mistress of the position, and might, cat-like, play a little with her victim, "I am glad to see your head is so much better that you are able to get out. Who was that gentleman who was here just now, and who jumped over the hedge?"

Struck suddenly by this question, Stella had recourse to weak evasion. In her confusion she dimly remembered that Miss De Vellembie was short-sighted, and on this she founded a faint hope that she might not (as Frederick's retreat had been so speedy) have noticed that they were talking together. Had not, however, her wits been half blunted by fright, she could not have failed to understand that Miss De Vellembie could hardly have asked her who the gentleman was, unless she had seen her speaking to him.

"I daresay he was some tourist. So many come to Rotherport at this time of the year," she said, trying to look unconcerned, but in reality looking guilty.

"But surely I saw the gentleman speaking to you? That was what made me think you must know him."

"He did just—that is to say, he made me a passing remark about—about the beautiful singing of the blackbirds."

"He must be a man of fine feeling to notice the singing of the blackbirds, and then to speak of it to the first pretty young lady he meets," said Miss De Vellembie, in a tone of grim satire.

"It was very kind, very considerate—I mean very polite of him," stammered poor Stella, who did not the least know what she was saying; for from the school-mistress's face and manner she now saw that she either knew or suspected something.


"You really did not know him, then?"

"Oh! no, of course not," answered Stella, plunging, in her desperation, and before she knew what she was about, right into the middle of a direct fib.

"You have not, I suppose, been out long?"

"No, not long," re-echoed Miss Silverton faintly.

"Oh! you daring, double-tongued little minx!" burst forth Miss De Vellembie, who could restrain herself no longer, and who, in the first outpour of her wrath, forgot to make her usual choice of words. "I know as well as you do that you have been talking to that young man for the last hour, and that five minutes ago you were walking hand-in-hand with him, in a way that it would be correct to do only with your grand-papa."



For a few moments Stella was so startled by this sudden showing forth of Miss De Vellembie's knowledge that she stood speechless. The very fact, however, of her being thus brought to bay made her courage quickly come back.

"As you know so much, Miss De Vellembie," she cried, "you shall know the whole at once. That gentleman was Mr. Frederick Oakleigh. I have promised to marry him, and I will marry him, because I love him—I do, I do, I do, I do, I do!" Then she burst out sobbing, and hid her crimson face in her hands.

Miss De Vellembie was in her heart very sorry for the girl as she looked at her. She felt, however, that the duty she owed to all papas and mammas, uncles and aunts, guardians, governesses, and school-mistresses, throughout the known world

(and her mind's eye, passing round the globes in her study, made her feel the more this responsibility), demanded it of her to be outwardly stern.

“Miss Silverton,” she said, having now quite regained her usual dignity of manner—“Miss Silverton, your behaviour has been deceitful, and is now unbecoming. Of your whole conduct, I will only say that I am as much shocked and surprised to find a pupil of mine acting thus, as I should be to find an alligator in——” —Miss De Vellembie hesitated slightly—“in my china-cupboard. I must request you to go back with me at once to the house, where you will remain in your own room, strictly watched, until to-morrow morning, when I shall take you to your guardian, whom I shall forewarn this evening, by telegraph, of our arrival. I

shall tell him all about your proceedings, of which, through a secret channel that I shall not mention more especially, I have learned much. Then I shall wash my hands of you."

So saying, she took the little culprit by the arm, and marched her off towards the house.

On the way, which was trodden in solemn silence by both, Stella recovered herself enough to wonder how Miss De Vellembie had found out her secret. This question she could not answer until afterwards, when Oakleigh told her of his meeting with the school-mistress, while looking for Golden Mount. She then concluded that, partly from what Frederick had said, and partly from the glimpse she had caught of the lovers together, Miss De Vellembie had guessed at the truth.

Miss De Vellembie never revealed to anyone her watch in the Summer-house. It was not that she thought this act an illegitimate one in her case ;—in general, indeed, she held eavesdropping to be dishonourable and unwarrantable, but in her position she deemed anything allowable which brought to her knowledge the underhand doings of those beneath her sway. Though, however, she held this doctrine privately, she did not declare it openly. If it got abroad in the school, it might make both teachers and pupils suspect that their mistress was also their spy ; and some of the bolder spirits among them might presume to question the exact right of this. So Miss De Vellembie wisely held her tongue, and always spoke of the way in which she had gained her knowledge of Stella's misconduct as "a secret channel

which she should not mention more explicitly." This was, indeed, the form of speech which she always used whenever, by underhand means, she found out anything which was going on wrong in the school.

Great was the stir made by Stella's misdemeanour that evening in Golden Mount. The girls sat in the class-room, nominally learning their lessons for to-morrow, but in reality whispering each to each the most strange and distorted versions of the facts. One said that Stella's lover had, disguised as a pedlar, actually come to the window of Miss De Vellembie's study; and another that a letter from him had been found in the crown of Miss Silverton's new hat, which was just come from the milliner. They were supposed to be overlooked by Mademoiselle, who, however (instead of


correcting exercises, which was her lawful work), was diligently employed in writing to her sister, who was French teacher at the great rival school in Exeter, a full account of the whole business, which was about as much like the truth as Mademoiselle's English was like the English of Joseph Addison.

The Fräulein and the Signora mounted guard by turns that evening outside Miss Silverton's door, sitting on a chair in the passage, for Miss De Vellembie had a vague notion that the culprit might slip down stairs and try to escape, and locking in was an indignity to which (on account of public feeling in the school), the good lady dared not subject the elder girls.

The German's mind throughout her watch was divided between settling whether she should look at Stella's case objectively or subjectively, and considering whether

marriage was likely on the whole to forward the spread of universal transcendental æsthetical spirituality. The Italian spent her time in a ceaseless pantomime. When Miss De Vellembie passed by, she turned up her eyes, but as soon as her back was turned made a face. When the pupils passed by, she held up her hands; when her fellow-teachers passed by, she shrugged her shoulders and winked. When the servants passed by, she sat with clasped hands, looking down like a saint on a shrine. When she was alone, she grinned horribly at the door. As for Miss De Vellembie herself, she was at intervals going up and down the passage like a stately pendulum till after midnight.

The only person allowed free access to the cell of the little prisoner was Miss Midhurst. She asked coaxingly to be granted



this, and Miss De Vellembie, who trusted her more than all the foreign teachers put together, let her have her own way. Monica tried at first both to comfort the girl and to make her talk freely.

Stella, however, would neither speak nor move, but sat in a corner looking very like a beautiful Eastern bird who has just been caught, and who sulks on his perch, with fear and anger in his bright eyes, with his gay feathers ruffled, and his dainty head bent down. The fact was, Stella meant to be acting in a grandly tragical way, like the heroines in some of the German plays she had lately read. To carry out this more fully, she resolved to eat nothing when Monica brought her up the milk and bread and butter, which formed the pupils' supper at Golden Mount. But about half-past nine hunger overcame tragedy. The


young lady finished every drop and morsel, comforting herself, however, the while, for this high treason against misery, by vowing she would do something which she vaguely characterized to herself as very dreadful, if she was not allowed to marry her Frederick, and go abroad with him at once.

Monica half pitied, half smiled as she watched her. Her quick insight into the minds of others showed her at once what was the state of feeling the girl was in. She soon ceased to try to make her speak, knowing well that before many hours were over, Stella's tongue would move quietly enough of its own free will.

"Pretty dear! And so they have a-shut her up all along of her having a young man," said cook that evening.

"I'll be bound," cried the housemaid, "old missus would have been ready enough

in her time to be Miss Willing if Mr. Right had come by. But he took pretty good care never to pass her way, you may depend upon it ; and so now she wishes to shut up all of we in a nunnery. But I won't be a nun, I can tell her." And then she began to sing "No followers allowed," making the lid of the mustard-pot she was cleaning tinkle to the tune.



CHAPTER V.

STELLA'S CONFESSION.

MISS DE VELLEMBIE'S favourite teacher had a weary time of it that evening. Like other ladies when anything startling has happened to them, Miss De Vellembie seemed to find a most surprising comfort in telling over and over again the fact, with a minuteness of detail worthy of a conscientious musical-box. When Monica moved to go, Miss De Vellembie always began this repetition ; when Monica fidgeted in her chair, Miss de-Vellembie asked, for the hundred and fiftieth time,


"How could I possibly, my dear, have acted differently from what I did?" When Monica put out her hand to take her candle, Miss De Vellembie started afresh on the theme of the perils through which her own youth had triumphantly steered.

True, most teachers would have liked the importance given by being their mistress's confidante; but Monica was very tired of the part, because Monica had never been quite like other young women. Before she was well in her teens she had begun to have a dim, restless notion that she was meant for something out of the common run. First, she had believed that she was to be the Joan of Arc of future history; next, she had been fully persuaded that some prince in disguise would fall in love with her; then she had resolved to go out as a female missionary. At seventeen

this restless feeling had made her leave the aunt who had brought her up, and whose comfortable income rendered it quite unnecessary that her niece should get a living for herself, to take the place of teacher at Golden Mount School. Here she had found pleasant exercise for her mind in the influence she gained over the younger girls, and in learning modern languages with the different masters.

A few months before this time she had written and sent to a periodical a paper, which had been accepted. This seemed to her the very height of all greatness; the girl believed herself immediately to be one of the first authoresses of the day, patronized everyone she met, thrust herself forward in all company, talked incessantly like a badly-written book, and was, in short, becoming a very insufferable young

person, when, fortunately for herself and her neighbours, the next paper she sent was rejected. This took her suddenly down from her high horse, and threw her into a slough of despond, in which she lay for a little while. Her inborn energy, however, soon made her gather herself up again. She was cured of her airs; she saw that, instead of having soared to a high pinnacle, she had only advanced her foot one very little step. She became more indulgent and less self-asserting towards others; she resolved to try to persevere in literary labour, but she saw now that patient work must be her watchword. She was still perhaps inclined to be at times rather supercilious with her neighbours, and too self-confident; but on the whole the lesson she received had done her a vast deal of good.



When at last that night Monica reached the room which she and Stella shared, she found her friend in bed and apparently asleep, though there were now and then certain slight quiverings about the corners of the mouth, which might awaken the suspicion that this latter fact was only outward seeming. Monica, however, did not try to find out whether this was so or not. She was very tired. The first thought of a long novel was beginning to make a vague melody in her brain. Besides, it was her principle never to ask for a friend's confidence. So she went silently to bed. After the candle was out, and she was dozing off, she had a sort of notion that she heard various significant creaks of Stella's little iron bedstead. But Monica would take no hint to speak first, and fell fast asleep. She was slipping very comfortably into a beatific

vision of a publisher, when all at once she was aroused by feeling a slender arm round her neck and a warm soft cheek pressed against her own.

"Oh, Monica dear, do let me talk to you," said a low voice close to her ear.

"We will talk about the book," murmured the still half dreaming authoress.

"It's books you're talking of again, is it? I wish I had only books to think of. I'm sure I've cried more about Frederick than ever I did even about the German declensions."

"Stella, darling, is it you? I was dreaming. Can I do anything for you?" cried Monica, who was now fully awake, and understood that the long-expected moment for the untying of the girl's tongue was come.

"I want to talk to you, Monica. Every night since we came back here this last

half I have been quite bursting to tell you all, but I was obliged to keep it a secret for a time—I had promised him I would. Oh, it is so horrid not to be able to speak when you want to do so. It is worse than having the toothache when you want to throw the windows open.”

“ But you might at least have spoken this evening long before this, if such had been the will of your serene highness,” answered Monica, with a touch of archness in her tone.

“ I—I—the fact is I had a fit of the sulks. I longed to be away from everybody, in one of those desert islands we read of in the geography books, with the monkeys and the cocoa-nuts.”

“ And how was it you took a sudden fancy for returning to civilized life, just as I had put out the candle ?”

“ Why, all the while you were undressing the words were rushing to my lips literally in floods, and if you had only come and bent over me for a moment, as anyone with common good feeling would have done, they would have rushed out at once. After you lay down I tumbled about in my bed in a way that must have touched any heart that was not an icicle. But instead of paying attention to me you fell asleep, and began dreaming about your old books, as if they were so many Fredericks; and when I heard you breathing so quietly and regularly, as if you meant not to wake till morning, I jumped out of bed and ran to you in sheer despair.”

“ But had I not better get up and light a candle? Should we not talk more comfortably so?”

“ No, no; let us stay as we are. You

lie still, and I will kneel here by you as I am. I feel somehow as if, with the black silent night around us, my heart were nearer to yours than it would be in the broad daylight. Besides—besides, I think I had rather tell even you about the way I learned to love him—in the dark,” and the quiver of the little hand which lay in Monica’s, and the warmer glow on the cheek which rested against hers, told the sweet shyness of the girl’s young love. “You know, darling,” she went on softly, “till to-day, when Miss De Vellembie forced it out of me, I never spoke to anyone about it except himself; and after she had made me say and show how much I loved him, I felt as if I had been profaning some holy thing.”

“I can quite understand that; all deep and kind feelings are holy things,” said Monica, kissing fondly the flushed cheek.

There was warm sympathy for all human nature in Monica Midhurst's calm and yet sensitive soul.

"Do you know, Monica, I often try to understand this love of mine, but can't for very wonder at it. It is so different from anything I ever knew before, and yet so sweet. It makes me feel so old in many ways, and yet I know I am still so much of a child. It stole upon me so unawares, and yet, when I found out it was there, I was not frightened, but only [glad with a gladness past words."

"This love is a riddle over which many heads, old and young, wise and foolish, have puzzled in vain before your time, Stella. But tell me, since you wish to tell me, how did you first get to know Mr. Oakleigh? That is his name, is it not?"


"It was one evening at Falcon's Nest,

this Summer. My guardian had fallen asleep over his wine after dinner; the moonlight out of doors looked so lovely that I put on my hat, and ran down to the river. It was very warm, and I sat for a few minutes on a stone, listening to its murmuring. The moonlight made me feel sad, as it often does, because it reminds me of a night very long ago, when, as a little child, I was carried into a room, lit only by the southern moon, to kiss for the last time my father, who was dying. It is only a dim remembrance, but still moonlight has always been connected with it in my mind. I was thinking whether my father was now looking down upon me from heaven, when, happening to raise my eyes, I saw near me a face with its gaze turned earnestly upon me. I started, and I believe cried out, but was very quickly

re-assured when I found it was only a gentleman, who had lost his way out fishing. I walked with him a short distance, to show him his road back to the farm where he was lodging, and we talked a little, but looked more."

"And you went on repeating these experiences until your tongues had learned to be quite as active as your eyes?"

"Yes, it did happen something in that way. I don't know how it was, but next day I found myself sauntering down the river in the direction of the farm he lived at, and he happened to be sauntering up the river with his rod; still less do I know how it was that every day, when I walked out (it was lovely weather, so I always wore my best hat), I always, by some inexplicable chance, met him before I went in again. He complained of loneliness,



and I thought it so sad for him, poor fellow, that sometimes I sat down on the grass, and chatted with him whilst he fished. At first we talked about the scenery, but thought of each other's faces—at least, I know I did of his. Next we talked of poetry, and repeated verses, which somehow we could never get more than half-way through. I suppose we have bad memories. Then we talked of the sort of people we liked; but there, too, we always had to stop half-way, because we incessantly found that each was describing the other. At last we got to talk about ourselves openly, and then we found plenty to say. Soon after that I discovered that I was laughing and crying at the same time, and that he was lying at my feet, holding my hand, and calling me his little wife."

"A very pretty progress from good to better, and at last to best. But now the turtles are paired, where is their nest to be?"

"When Frederick takes me home, it will be to no dove's nest, but to an eagle's eyrie," said Stella, with a charming touch of naïve, almost childish pride in her tone. "His uncle, whose heir he will be, is the master of Oakleigh Hall, a grand old place in Herefordshire, where the family have lived for hundreds of years. But we shan't go there to live at our ease till we are grave, middle-aged people, who have done a great deal in the world."

"And what field does your *preux chevalier* mean to choose for his battle of life? Will he write a book to prove Heliogabalus a saint?—or will he set on foot a scheme of popular cheap charity for feeding the



poor on the steam that comes from the rich man's kitchen?—or will he become the proprietor of a register office, where plain girls may hear of younger sons?"

"Frederick is going to be a great naturalist," said the girl, in the same tone of pretty pride as before. "He and I are going out with a wonderfully wise scientific German professor to South America, where we shall sit under trees with leaves as big as umbrellas, and have for dessert fruits like those the fairies eat, and where he will read everything, from the tops of the high forests down to the little insects in the grass, more easily a great deal than you do your Greek books; and by-and-by we shall come home with a whole ship full of strange animals and plants, and the Queen will hear of it, and will be sure to make him Sir Frederick."

“And then my lady will sometimes let her old friend the poor quill-driver creep down from her garret to sit in the corner of her brilliant drawing-room.”

“And then my lady will bring all the good and precious things she has in the world, and pour them out before her friend, and say this is but a faint pledge of the dear old love between us, and but a poor, slight return for the more than sister’s care you gave the sisterless girl.” Both arms were round Monica’s neck now, and she could feel the glowing cheek was wet.

They were silent for some moments; then Monica said,

“But why, my love, did you keep this a secret? It was casting a shadow on so bright a beginning.”

“Well, it was naughty of us, I know; but, you see, we could not have lived if we

had given each other up, and we thought better times would come soon—and they have come, and it is all right now.” Then she told Monica about Oakleigh’s quarrel with his uncle, and about its happy conclusion.

“I am glad, Stella,” said Monica, earnestly, “that your promised husband is a man with a noble purpose, not a loiterer in the world’s great workshop, who dawdles about, here playing with an idea and there scheming over a theory, but a man with a vocation in life which he accepts at once, and means to follow with his might.”

“And can I ever be a strength and a support to him in his life’s work?” asked she, in a low voice, nestling closer.

“Yes, darling, with God’s good help, and with your woman’s love, you will.” And, soothed by that sweet prophecy, little Stella crept back to bed, and fell asleep.

CHAPTER VI.

MR. SPARSHAW.

NEXT morning Miss De Vellembie started, with Stella in custody, for Falcon's Nest, where lived Mr. Sparshaw, the young lady's guardian. Monica went with them, partly as a sort of under-keeper, and partly that Miss De Vellembie might have some one to talk to, dignity forbidding any intercourse between her majestic self and the culprit.


The great ambition of everyone that morning at Golden Mount was to see the start, without incurring Miss De Vellembie's

wrath by gratuitous spying. Cook was looking for sage in the garden when the carriage drove up that took them to the station. The housemaid was seized with a sudden and righteous horror of dust, and beat the mats unmercifully on the lawn. The Fräulein, who was always down late on account of her tangled locks, declared it to be too insufferably hot to breakfast indoors, and established herself in the arbour, with her usual morning meal of five radishes, seven lettuces, and an onion. Mademoiselle found the new stitch in her lace-work so intricate that she needed the full light of the large window in the dining-room. The Signora recollected that she had promised the holy saints, for some past short-coming, to walk nineteen times up and down the gravel walk as a penance.

As for the pupils, they pervaded the

whole place in flashes and glimpses, always vaguely visible, and yet actually never there. They thrust their heads out of unexpected windows, and round impossible corners. They appeared at the hall door in a sort of dissolving view for a moment in a mass, and then vanished with lightning speed one by one till not a petticoat was left. They darted down on to the terrace. They peeped over walls. They dodged about among the trees. They slipped away through wire fences.

Monica took a book of Browning's to read on the journey, but did not turn over one page. In the railway she was between her two friends. On one side sat Miss De Vellembie, grave and stern, helmet-bonneted, gauntlet-gloved, and with her grey shawl tightly pinned up in a way that was suggestive of chain-armour. On the other



was Stella, blushing and palpitating; an April mixture of smiles and tears. At first Miss De Vellembie poured out to Monica (but evidently for Stella's sole behoof) an eloquent discourse on female propriety of behaviour.

When, however, the good lady began to nod, as was always her practice in railway travelling, Stella's little tongue took up softly the ball of conversation. Her style of talk was a string of questions, which never changed either in order or import, about her Frederick. Would he have written to her guardian, or would he have gone to Falcon's Nest, to plead his cause, so that he would be there to hand them out of the carriage? If he was, should she frown on him for his abominable and cowardly behaviour in running away the evening before at the sight of Miss De Vellembie? Would he think her

looking well, or were her eyes too red? Would he notice that she had on the same dress as she wore when he proposed to her? Would he have been able to eat any breakfast that morning, poor fellow? Would not her guardian be sure to be struck by his gentlemanly manners? If he wanted her to go out and sit in the verandah with him directly after dinner, would it be unbecoming to the dignity of an engaged young lady to take with her a plate of candied fruit?

Whenever either of Monica's companions wanted to hold any communion with each other, they never did it directly, but always through her, as though she had been an interpreter, and they had used different languages. At length when the helmet bonnet had been a good deal disarranged by certain violent shocks caused by abrupt

and eccentric movements of Miss De Vellembie's head, and when Stella had gone through her questions some fifteen times with apparently unflagging interest, they reached the station where they had to get out.

Mr. Sparshaw lived in a very retired country district, which had never heard even the echo of a steam-whistle. They had therefore a long drive to reach Falcon's Nest. For some miles at first their way led along the high road, which ran through a broad rich valley, at the side of a river whose foaming, flashing waters showed it to be no child of the warm drowsy lowlands, but a son of the open moor, where the bold breeze dances and the saucy heather-bell nods to him, beckoning for a boisterous kiss. The long sweep of the mower's scythe sounded through the ripe corn; which,

however, in some spots still waved unscathed its golden plumes. The red Devon cattle and the white sheep made pretty coloured checkerwork on the green fields. The market-women, most of them with the brilliant dark eyes and hair which are peculiar to the daughters of North Devon, and are said to come from an old infusion of Spanish blood, trotted merrily homeward among their empty baskets. The spirited little cart-horses, with their small Exmoor heads, cantered back from a mid-day drink in the river, rattling their chain-harness.

After a while they turned off the highway. The road now became so narrow, and was sunk between such high banks, that it was almost like an immense gutter. Thick branches made a green arch overhead. The deep hedges were draped with feathery ferns. Every mile the country grey wilder

and wilder. Petulant little streams started up at the wayside, and threw themselves across the road. Here they passed through a belt of shaggy woodland, and there over an open common. Every mile also the road grew worse and worse. Now the horses slid down a slope of sheer rock. Now they toiled up a bed of rough loose stones. Now the carriage jolted over a deep wide gap, which was almost a crevasse.

Little Stella's spirits rose as they went on. The whole country was familiar to her since childhood, for she had always spent the holidays with her guardian. Each neat hill-country homestead, each gateway which opened out a view of green upland and sparkling stream, each patch of heathery ground, had for her some dear old memory of cheery meetings, or of hours of dreamy

fancy, or of golden Summer rambles. She was drawing near the only home she had known since she could remember anything distinctly, and she could not believe but that happiness awaited her there.

This part of the journey had, however, a very different effect upon Miss De Vellembie. That good lady had never been much of a traveller, except in her flights of imagination around the globes in her own study. A horse in the abstract, when he could be called a steed, was to her a noble creature, who pranced in processions and did wonderful things in the wars of the Medes and Persians. But a horse in real life was according to her an uncomfortably suspicious animal, given to mysterious ways with his ears, ominous freaks with his tail, and unpleasant habits with all his four legs in general. As for carriages, Miss De Vel-

lembie had a vague notion that she should have liked to ride in a Roman chariot, but all modern vehicles were looked upon by her as dangerous machines, invented for the destruction of unwary man.

Yet, even in the midst of her fears, Miss De Vellembie was true to her duty of improving the youthful mind. Her talk ran somewhat in this manner: "My dears, observe that field of cattle. The cow, with trees and water in the background, always makes a charming landscape, after the style of Claude, that true painter of—but, oh! what a terrible jolt! I'm quite certain all the spokes will come out of the wheels.

"The botanist would find a perfect feast in these woods and hedges. No doubt all the classes of plants mentioned by Linnaeus might be discovered here.

Do look how that black horse is shaking his head. I don't like it at all.

"It is interesting to think how in past centuries the early Britons must have roamed about these solitudes in shaggy skins, with bow and spear, and how—They are running away, I know they are. We shall be upset before we get to the bottom. Stop, driver, stop !"

But Miss De Vellembie's dangers were now drawing to a close. A prolonged jolt over the stony bed of the river; a stout pull which tried rather shrewdly the metal of the hardy little posters up the hill on the other side, and they stood before the door of Falcon's Nest.

It was an old-fashioned house, perched just above the river, with quaint gables starting out abruptly from every part of it, as though all its life it had been making

vain attempts to grow larger, with pert little windows peeping forth here and there from odd places in the roof, with green creepers clinging in fantastic grace round porch and lattice.

And the master of this dwelling was well worthy of it. Mr. Sparshaw was a man of contradictions. He was the best rider to hounds over the moor, the best hand with gun and rod, the best judge of a field of turnips in the neighbourhood, and yet in his parish (for he was a clergyman) his ready shilling, and still readier sympathy, made him loved as never cope or cassock made priest loved before or since. He was in thought and deed the most perfect gentleman that ever breathed, and yet his manners were rough, and both his expressions and accent often broad North Devon. He had been in a chronic state of love-

making from sixteen to sixty, and yet he was still a bachelor. His uneven temper constantly made him dismiss a labourer overnight, and yet his soft heart was so well known that the man always appeared at his work again next morning as if nothing had happened. In short, he was a type of clergyman, farmer, and squire all in one—a type which is quickly, alas! passing away, even in the West of England. He was a spare little old man, with a sharp, deeply sun-burnt face, which looked as if it might have been cut out of a crust of home-made bread.

“Well, what’s the row? what’s the row?” cried Mr. Sparshaw, running out to the door as they drew up. “A telegram last night and a carriage full of ladies to-day—either thing enough to put a man into a quiver!”

“Sir,” answered Miss De Vellembié, speaking solemnly, and making a wonderful bow in the air as he helped her to get out, “I should not have telegraphed had not the business been very pressing, and now I am come to speak to you on a very grave matter about your ward.”

“Bother the little hussy!” exclaimed Mr. Sparshaw, who, as has been before said, was not always very choice in his language. “What has she been doing? Tearing up her spelling books? Playing with her doll in school hours? Spoiling her best frock out nutting?”

“Sir, in my educational establishment, which is the first, I think I may say, in the west of England, I do not encourage jokes; and so I am not much accustomed to them.”

“Why, my good lady, talk without a

joke would be like dinner without salt. Doctors say that would be very unwholesome, and I am sure this life of ours would be very unsavoury—wouldn't keep sweet—without a little fun."

"But this, sir, is a very serious affair. I must beg for a private interview with you, to explain it."

"Ma'am, I am at your orders. But first let me take a look at my girl here;" and he turned towards Stella, with all the kindly heart of the man making sunshine in his eyes, while he laid his hand, half fondly, half proudly, on her shoulder. "The little witch grows prettier every time I see her—by Jove! she does! But what are these long curls for, my beauty?—are they for the young men to catch hold of?"

"Sir, my young ladies are accustomed to find those with whom they associate

very select, both in their words and the subject of them," said Miss De Vellembie severely.

"What, do you think I have lived all my life in an empty barrel with the head on, and don't know how to behave to young ladies? Ask the pretty girls who came three quarters of the way to meet him, only he would not go the other quarter, if Christopher Sparshaw did not know how to please young ladies. But who is your friend, my dear?" he went on again, speaking to Stella; "I like her face; she looks as if she knew what she was thinking about."

"Dear guardian, this is Monica Midhurst. I have often told you of her, haven't I? Isn't she a darling?"

"Yes, that she is!" said Mr. Sparshaw, patting Monica on the shoulder, as if he

had known her twenty years. "Welcome to Falcon's Nest, my dear. Are you one of the Midhursts of Barnstaple?"

"My father was a doctor in that town."

"Ah! that accounts for the milk in the cocoa-nuts. Many a hard gallop have your uncle, Dick Midhurst, the doctor's brother, and I had across the moor together. He was a rare good fellow was poor Dick, and knew a good glass of port when he tasted it as well as any man."

"May I be allowed to remind you, sir, that it is six o'clock, and you have promised me a private interview?" said Miss De Vellembie, in the warning tone of a reproachful clock, that tells us on a frosty morning we ought to have been up and in our cold bath half an hour ago.

"Thank you, ma'am, for reminding me,

and for making me remember to do what I ought to have done before (only my pretty rogue and her friend put it out of my head)—that is to say how glad I am to see you here. Mine is a bachelor's house, my dear lady, and I have only bachelor's fare to offer ; but my friends may be sure it has always plenty of heart-seasoning. I must thank you, besides, for the good care you have taken of my little Stella."

"It is always my endeavour to do my duty to the dear girls given into my charge," said Miss De Vellembie, much softened by his last words.

"Well, we must all do our duty," answered Mr. Sparshaw, with a sly glance at the girls, as, with Miss De Vellembie's finger-tips resting on his arm, he led her into the house.

CHAPTER VII.


THE SURPRISE.

“SOMETHING tangible—if I could only get them to settle something tangible !”

Those words formed a sort of chorus to all the hopes and fears and longings poured forth by Stella throughout that endless half-hour in which her guardian and her school-mistress were closeted together. Stella walked restlessly up and down the verandah. Monica sat still, trying, if possible, at last to turn over the leaf and to get a passing glance of Pippa, but

“something tangible” always came between her and the little maiden’s song. Indeed, throughout her whole after-life Monica could never hear those two words without being reminded of a slight form in blue drapery wandering to and fro, of the scent of mignonette, and of the hum of weary bees burdened with many sweets.

In this latter respect, however, the name of Frederick Oakleigh did not share exactly the fate of the bees that afternoon on the lips of his beloved. From Mr. Sparshaw’s manner, she was certain he had neither heard nor seen anything of Frederick, and this made her very indignant. He was a horrid coward; there was more courage in the point of her crochet-needle than in him. He was a worse traitor than Guy Fawkes. She had a good mind to have nothing more to do with him, that



she had. These spirited outbursts of just wrath were a passing relief to Monica from "something tangible."

At length the hall-door opened.

"If you please, Miss Silverton," said one of the female servants, "master wishes you to go to him in his study directly."

"Something tangible" had apparently got on to Stelle's tongue now, for it was as still as a frightened bird. Her cheeks were the colour of the deepest blush-rose in the garden. Her eyes looked ready to fill with tears at a moment's notice, and yet still smiles were flitting about her mouth. Her little hands played nervously with golden chain and silken tress. The servant marked these signs, full of meaning, as the young lady passed into the house, and guessing, womanlike, something of the real state of things, smirked significantly.

Mr. Sparshaw's study was only so called by courtesy. It was full of guns, fishing-rods, prints of pretty women and race-horses, old harness, boots and bottles,—anything, in short, except books. Miss De Vellembie sat by the table, looking cold and prim; Mr. Sparshaw stood by the chimney-piece, looking hot and fierce when Stella entered. She only glanced at them for a moment, and then fixed her eyes on the faded green stars in the carpet.

“Stella, come here,” said Mr. Sparshaw, his full, deep bass voice, with its strong Devonshire burr breaking awfully the silence which pervaded the room.

The red, trembling culprit went and stood before her judge.

“Now, young woman, what is this you have been doing?”

"I can't—I suppose—I really don't know," faltered poor Stella.

"You don't know?—then if you don't, I do. I know that you are the deepest little hypocrite that ever lived; I know that you have presumed to think of having a lover when you had no business to know a man from a milestone; I know that, if I had been your governess, I would have tied you up to the bed-post with your own garters."

"Sash, if you please—sash," put in Miss De Vellembie, in a tone of injured modesty.

"Oh! dear guardian, do you talk to me in this way, you who are generally so kind?" said Stella, her tears beginning to flow fast.

"Dear guardian! Yes, indeed, I have been a dear guardian. I have let her go with the

bridle on her neck ; I have never put anything into her mouth harder than a bit of pack-thread ; I have never pulled the right rein when she wanted to go to the left ; and for all this she rewards me by going and taking the first fence into matrimony without so much as asking my leave."

"I would have asked it, I would have told you everything, only——"

"Ifs and onlys are the devil's cushions, which he slips under us when he is going to make us sit plump down in the middle of a dirty puddle."

"Oh, dear sir, how can you say such dreadful things ?—how can you be so cruel ?" sobbed Stella.

"Cruel, am I ? Is it cruel, I should like to know, to save a girl from a fellow who is very likely a swindler ? Is it cruel not to let her make herself the story of all

the cackling old gossips within twenty miles round? Is it cruel not to allow her, at the best, to live on brown bread and small beer—to spend her nights in trying to turn old gowns into new ones, and her days in going about with a dozen brats squalling after her?”

“The nursery, sir, is never named until after the hymeneal knot has been tied at the altar,” here interposed Miss De Vellembie, coming boldly forward in the cause of outraged propriety.

“That, ma’am, is a want of Christian foresight. No house is so difficult to be good in as the house where the money runs short. You can’t dress your daughter in sentiment and moonshine, unless you mean to bring her up to be the wife of a chief in the Sandwich Islands; and you can’t feed your son on cinders, unless you mean to

train him to be a fire-eating conjurer. Therefore, ma'am, it is most decidedly want of Christian foresight."

"But Frederick will be very rich; he says I shall wear silk every day," sighed out little Stella.

"That penniless adventurer dress her in silks every day! Why, the girl must be mad! She will be trying next to get a farmer to say he is contented, or a man to tell the truth about his horse, or a woman about her age! She might really try to do any of these impossible things if she raves in this way. I tell you what it is, young lady, if you persist any longer in these illusions, I shall give you over into the hands of a friend of mine who is staying in the house, and who is a noted mad doctor."

Anger was now beginning to chase away

fear and grief from the girl's mind. She restrained her tears, and her little mouth grew resolute.

"You can give me into whose hands you like," she flashed out. "I am Frederick's, and will go to Frederick. I gave him my heart, and you have no right to take it from him."

"My friend will take good care that you don't get away from him; he has means which never fail with refractory young lady patients. If he can't quiet you by whispering a word in your ear, as I think he very likely may, for he is a wonderful man, he will put you in chains you will never escape from."

"I don't care what he does, or you do, or anybody else does—you shall none of you make me give up Frederick!" And in her passion she stamped her little foot.

"I wager his way of stopping that rebellious little mouth will succeed," said Mr. Sparshaw, who, oddly enough, grew cooler as his ward grew more warm.

"I should just like to see him try," retorted Stella, with a vindictive movement of her hand.

"And those pretty fingers which now stir themselves so spitefully will be as still as the little silver trout when they sleep under the bank, if he but touches them," went on the guardian.

"I suppose you mean to frighten me by making me think the man's a magician," rejoined she, with a scornful toss of her head.

"That is exactly, I should say, my dear, what you will find him," said Mr. Sparshaw, who was now most provokingly calm.

"If you only sent for me to talk such ridiculous stuff as this, I shall leave the room;" and with much majesty Miss Silver-ton moved towards the door.

"Doctor, come and take your patient into safe keeping," cried Mr. Sparshaw, raising his voice.

The study opened into the dining-room; the door between was now thrown quickly back, as though impelled by an eager hand, and a gentleman entered the room. Not all her anger and grief could quite smother Stella's girlish curiosity. She turned her head and glanced at the new comer. A wondering cry of "Frederick! Frederick!" burst from her lips.


Then, in sweet embarrassment, she ran back to where Miss De Vellembie was sitting, and falling on her knees beside her, hid her face on that motherly breast.

Tenderly, gently, the kind arms folded round her. All little Stella's offences were forgotten; every line of conventional dignity was gone from the schoolmistress's face and figure; and with nothing but her woman's heart in her eyes, the childless old maid bent over her child.

"The little, incomprehensible, unreasonable riddle! She goes and hugs an old woman when her young man is in the room!" exclaimed Mr. Sparshaw, staring at his ward in blank surprise, not unmixed with disappointment.

But Oakleigh understood better the situation. He drew near, and leaning over her, took the hand which lay on the arm of Miss De Vellembie's chair, and kissed it softly.

"That's right, my lad!" cried Mr. Sparshaw, now more pleased; "but why not



her lips, my boy—why not her lips ? Bless your heart ! she would like it much better.”

“Can you forgive me, dearest?” whispered Oakleigh, bending yet lower, and evidently, for the moment, no more hearing Mr. Sparshaw than if that worthy man had been the Sultan of Cabul giving orders to his Grand Vizier. “I behaved shamefully and detestably, I know, in running away from you as I did yesterday evening ; but I hope I have made up a little for it by coming here before you, telling your guardian everything, and getting his full consent.”

Slowly she raised and turned her head ; their eyes met. How many closely printed pages were there in that one look !

“My guardian knows everything, and gives his consent?” repeated she, doubtfully.

"Yes, my darling, I do—and I am well pleased with your choice," said Mr. Sparshaw, as he came forward and raised her gently. Then, keeping one hand in his, while Frederick still held the other, he went on: "He is as fine and brave and true-hearted a young fellow as ever started on life's highway. God bless you, my Stella, and may you be a happy wife!" and he laid lovingly his hand on the head, still half drooped in girlish shyness, and kissed the fair brow.

"But why, then, were you so unkind to me just now?" asked she, looking up simply into his face.

"That was all a trick of your naughty old guardian's to tease you," said Oakleigh. "He first insisted on my becoming his accomplice, and then Miss De Vellembie."

"Yes, it was all your old guardian's in-

corrigible spirit of mischief," cried Mr. Sparshaw, with his noisy, free west-country laugh. "But you will forgive me for it, I know you will. He was in the next room all the while, you know, and heard every word. That fact of itself will, I am certain, gain for me my pardon—it was so prettily contrived."

"Dear guardian, best and truest friend, all that you do, although at first it may seem wrong, is sure at last to turn into right," and, letting go her lover's hand, she threw both arms around her second father's neck.

"What! are sugar-plums so plentiful that there are even a few for the old man? But take them back to their rightful owner, my beauty,—take them back. I see he is growing desperately jealous, and I have no taste for the smell of powder," and he

laughed his hearty laugh again, and made a movement as though he would put her into Oakleigh's arms.

"No, no, no!" cried she, holding firmly to her guardian and assuming a stern look. "He is not yet forgiven. He must first answer for his misdeed. Come here, sir, and stand upon your trial."

"This is your first appearance before the matrimonial court-martial, my boy, in which it is law that woman is always in the right," said Mr. Sparshaw.

Oakleigh came and stood before her in a submissive attitude. "Now, sir," she went on, "what have you to say for yourself about your shameful breach of allegiance yesterday evening?—deserting your sovereign lady in her hour of need. Running away just when the trumpet sounded for the fight."

"Most gracious madam," began Oakleigh, "there was some excuse for my crime, heinous though it was. Yesterday evening, before I saw you, I met——" but here he broke off and reddened, for his eye had fallen on Miss De Vellembie.

"Yesterday evening," said Miss De Vellembie, coming forward with a smile which made her middle-aged face young again,—“yesterday evening, my dear, before Mr. Oakleigh saw you, he met me and asked me the way to Golden Mount. We walked a little distance together, and he talked to me about myself without guessing who I was.”

"It's never pleasant, ma'am, to feel the other side of our neighbour's tongues. We are sure to get a rough lick when we do," put in Mr. Sparshaw.

Oakleigh stood silent, still looking as red


and awkward as it was possible for a handsome young lover to do. Miss De Vellembie saw this. Now, under the outside rind of her pedantic stiffness, her scholastic dignity, and her ponderous self-importance, the good lady had a very kind heart, and to that heart little Stella, and in consequence little Stella's promised husband, had thoroughly made way. So she went up to Frederick with outstretched hand and said, "Mr. Oakleigh, let us both forget that we ever met till we came to Falcon's Nest, and date our friendship from this happy evening."

The young man took the old maid's hand and pressed it gratefully, for it is no pleasant thing for a gentleman to look hopelessly awkward, and to know that he is looking so in the presence of the girl he loves. "Stella's old friend must be my friend," he said warmly.

“And now, Miss De Vellembie, let us act the part of extinguishers no longer,” cried Mr. Sparshaw; and he turned to leave the room.

“No, we will go,” said Stella, taking Oakleigh’s arm. “He is forgiven now.” And they passed out through the open window.

The sun had set, leaving a bright remembrance of himself in the western sky; the stars were beginning to look out like the eyes of friendly angels; the flowers breathed forth new sweets beneath the kisses of the falling dew; the breeze whispered tenderly to leaf and blade. Down the garden path they went, now in shadow, now in light, his strong hands holding hers, her head bowed softly on his shoulder. Kind stars shine on them, for they love so dearly!



CHAPTER VIII.

BEFORE A PARTING.

“TWO glasses for the bridegroom, three for the bride, four for the first baby, five for a safe journey out, six for a quick return home—that’s the allowance for to-night; anything less would be unchristian.”

So said Mr. Sparshaw, the evening before the wedding-day. He had been making a speech, as he was fond of doing on all great occasions, in which his words had run rather short, though his dear old heart had overflowed in his eyes. Around the

table sat Stella, Monica, her bridesmaid, Miss De Vellembie, Frederick Oakleigh, and his uncle.

The elder Oakleigh was a man whose face at seventy would bear closer looking into than his past life—a man who cared more for his coat-of-arms than his character—a man of vast illusions, but scant solid reality—a man of much talking, but little doing. He was not exactly the sort of uncle Stella would have wished, but he was Frederick's nearest relation, and he flattered and petted her, and so she took him as he was.

Except Stella, who had been with her guardian ever since her engagement was openly declared, all the other guests had come that afternoon. As usual at such times, all of them were very silent except Sparshaw, who talked to hide what he felt,

and the elder Oakleigh, who always talked in season and out of season, wherever he might be.

"Take a glass of port to-night, Frederick, my boy," began Mr. Sparshaw. "It's the prime old thirty-four, and as mild as morning dew, and as full-bodied as the song of a blackbird. Give up for once your thin, wiry claret. You should do it out of compliment to your bride. Why, it's like nothing but a mixture of ink, vinegar, and a solution of rusty iron. It's a real disgrace to a woman to drink her health in it."

"Sparshaw, my dear friend," rejoined old Mr. Oakleigh, in his bland voice, "I agree in some measure with what you have just said. I don't quite approve of the growing taste for a variety of light wines amongst our young men. I can, of course,

appreciate a glass of good claret or moselle, as I can, I am thankful to say, anything excellent. But my opinion is that, if a man can't be contented with a glass of good port, he ought to get nothing better than water all his days."

"What a glorious day it will be for Falcon's Nest when my darling brightens it again!" said Mr. Sparshaw, after a short silence, being unable to keep quite off his tongue what was uppermost in his mind. "Not that I grudge her to you, Frederick; for though she is a pearl of pearls, and a flower of flowers, I know you have a strong arm to protect her and a warm heart to shelter her. Not that I would not have her go with you to a foreign land; for, though she would have made as much stir among the die-away misses of a London ball-room as one of the pheasants in my

cover if it got among the birds who sit and mope in their cages in the Zoological Gardens, I know that a brave-souled woman would rather tramp round the world at the side of the man she loves than lie on a cushion at home eating strawberries and cream. Not that I blame you yourself for going on this expedition; for though I think the fellow happiest who settles down on a good estate with a nice little herd of short-horns, and a few south-lying fields by way of business, and a well-bred nag to gallop after the hounds by way of amusement, I know a man can't cut out his work for himself, but must find it cut out for him. It's only because I'm getting a rusty old bachelor, and she is the oil that polishes me."

"Woman is the universal polish of society," said old Oakleigh, speaking his

well-turned platitude as grandly as if it had been a most original thought. "You should have seen my dear first recline upon a sofa! And as for my dear second, quite a crowd used to assemble to witness the grace with which she stepped out of her carriage, in her silks and jewels, at the door of the opera-house. Ah! they were indeed two incomparable women; and now they look like a pair of lovely sisters, hanging in my drawing-room in full length crayons, which cost two hundred each."

This piece of family history was not received with the interest it merited, considering the high rank held by the speaker in his native county. Frederick Oakleigh was, in the most open and palpable way, looking at and thinking of no one but Stella. His glass was full of Stella, the biscuits were crisped by Stella,

and it even would not be too much to say that, as far as he was concerned, there was only Stella in the room. Stella was pretending to be interested in the filberts on her plate, but was in reality interested in nothing but Frederick. Mr. Sparshaw was trying to think of the portwine, but was thinking only of his ward. Monica's energies were fully employed in endeavouring not to cry over the thought of parting from her friend. She had pictured herself in her own mind behaving on this occasion with calm dignity, but she was finding rules of conduct much easier to break than even to make. Miss De Vellembie was bravely trying to listen, in a ladylike way, though all the while she was thinking how she missed little Stella's merry laugh from the dinner-table at Golden Mount. Therefore Mr. Oakleigh's


last speech fell flat on a blank plain of silence.

At length Mr. Sparshaw, thinking himself bound as host to say something, cried out,

“My dear souls, is there not a man or woman among you that can sing a song or tell a tale?”

“There’s the story-teller,” said Stella, smiling, and pointing at Monica.

“What! is she one of the lady-novelists who are, I hear, on all the housetops now-a-days?” exclaimed Mr. Sparshaw. “Well, I never should have thought it, she is so quiet; and I fancied women of that sort had tongues like millclappers. But I suppose she’s one of your close ones. I hope, my dear, you do it thoroughly in your stories;—a bigamy, a burglar, a fire, and a pretty girl jumping in her night-



dress out of a window in the third story."

"My dear sir, my dear sir," remonstrated Miss De Vellembie. "Stella, Monica, my dears, look at the epergne!"

"I never look into a novel now," said Mr. Oakleigh, clasping his hands and bowing his handsome silver head with the air of a St. Jerome. "Books of devotion are my only reading. I often sit the whole morning with one of these in my hand in my library. By-the-way, Fred, that is really an elegant room. The chairs of green leather with gilt studs, and the oak book-cases which are exquisitely carved, stand out remarkably well from the rose-tinted paper on the walls. Yes, I sit there lost in the most sublime meditation, and sometimes think how I should like to have lived in days of old when I could have gone bare-foot on a pilgrimage, and have lain down

to sleep on the hard ground beneath the open sky near some wayside shrine. I feel certain that if I had been born four hundred years ago I should have worn a hair shirt and been a begging friar."

"The monastic period must always be a most interesting one for the student," here observed Miss De Vellembie, who now thought she saw an opening for giving, as she expressed it in her own mind, an instructive and elegant turn to the conversation. "Artistically it is most precious. Witness the graceful arch and the ivy-mantled wall which often make so delightful a figure in the landscape, crowning some wooded height, and which have defied the hand of time, ever since Henry VIII. suppressed the monasteries in——"

Miss De Vellembie fished about hurriedly in her memory for the date, but it would

not come to the surface, and so she ended the sentence with, "in the early part of that ever-to-be-remembered sixteenth century, which produced a Shakespeare, a Bacon, and a Raleigh."

"Those strolling priests must have been a rare lot of old humbugs," cried Mr. Sparshaw, not at all following Miss De Vellembie's lead as he should have done, but looking at Mr. Oakleigh rather as if he thought there was some likeness between him and the monks in this latter respect. "Fancy a set of fellows making virtues out of laziness and dirt, and living at other people's cost ! If I had been the Lord Abbot, I would have made every man Jack of them stay at home, and go to dig potatoes for some poor neighbour ; and at night I would have told them that they had done a far better day's work in the

Lord's vineyard than ever they had done before."

"After all, no virtue is like charity," said Mr. Oakleigh, with a benign smile. "I have often thought so when from the windows of some restaurant in the Italian cities I have watched the squalid beggars in the street. Spielman's in Rome is, I think, the best place for luncheon in Italy. His cutlets, garnished with truffles and flavoured with just a *soupeçon* of lemon juice, are really exquisite."

"Did you ever pop one of them into the mouth of one of those poor hungry devils you were speaking of?" asked Mr. Sparshaw, with a twinkle in his eye.


"We must not pamper the appetites of the poor," answered Mr. Oakleigh solemnly; "I allow the labourer—" and here he waved his hand as though he were making

a most gracious concession,—“I allow the labourer most willingly his bread and cheese, no one can say that I do not. But I have no sympathy with those who would lift the lower orders out of the station in which Providence has placed them. It is unnatural, it is unreasonable, it is irreligious,” and he spoke the last words in a grandly falling cadence, which rather impressed Miss De Vellembie.

“I wish, Frederick, you and Stella could pack up an English fireside, and take it out with you,” said Mr. Sparshaw, who could not for the life of him forget his heart, for all Mr. Oakleigh’s fine talk. “I could picture you to myself sitting by your own hearth, and talking over old friends and places at home, but I can’t at all imagine you doing it reclining in a tent, with a lot of rum outlandish chaps seen

through the open door ; or lying under a tree, laden with fruits as strange as any crazy market-gardener could dream of. Confound all your hot climates say I, where able-bodied men and women loll about yawning and panting in the shade, and swilling down sour drinks by the bucket-full ! Give me a Winter day in Old England, with a bright frost outside and a bright fire indoors."

"When you are as old as I am, dear boy, a retired home will be your highest ambition," said Mr. Oakleigh to his nephew. "A cottage with woodbine and love, that is my ideal. I was thinking so yesterday as I walked up and down my two drawing-rooms, waiting for a party of nineteen. By-the-by, Sparshaw, my friend, that reminds me. I cannot, after all, accept your kind invitation to spend a few days



with you. I have just remembered that the Earl and Countess of Windyshire are coming on Thursday to stay with me. Very strange that I should have forgotten it till now ! I suppose it's from having such incessant engagements at this time of year with the surrounding nobility."

"Stella, my darling, you are looking pale this evening," said Mr. Sparshaw, who was not as much struck as he ought to have been with his new friend's grandeur, and whose eyes all the while Mr. Oakleigh was speaking had been wandering anxiously to his ward's face. "Remember, girls, I won't have any bed-room privy-councils held to-night. I wish some one could tell me why it is that young ladies, though they have been together since early dawn, can never reveal their secrets to each other till they are brushing their hair."

"You will let me go and say my last farewell to the river by moonlight, dear guardian; I must, you know, because it introduced me to Frederick," cried Stella, rising from her place at the table, and perching herself on the arm of the old man's chair.

"What charming artless grace!" said Mr. Oakleigh, bending across the table and speaking in a stage-whisper to his nephew. "We may say a real Perdita. Dear boy, it is such an indescribable comfort to me that you should have chosen a wife with a profile so like that of the Lady Arabella Myrtle, the belle of this season. My sweet child,"—this was of course aloud to Stella,—
"I must order for you from Elise a head-dress exactly similar to that worn by Lady Arabella in her picture which was in the Exhibition."

"You may dress her as Queen Dido or Queen Dollarolla, uncle, as far as I am concerned," said Frederick, laughing.

Hereupon Miss De Vellembie rose and made a hasty retreat to the drawing-room. Dido, though a classical personage, was not exactly the sort of character to be brought before the young female mind; and as for the other royal lady mentioned, she certainly was not in any of the tables of Kings and Queens in Miss De Vellembie's wide experience, and so there was no knowing who she might have been, or whom the gentlemen might talk of next.

That night Stella wandered alone by the moonlit river. The swift-flowing stream had always had for her a voice. When she had been naughty as a child it had murmured to her chidingly, "Little Stella, little Stella, be good and patient,

little Stella." When she was going to school it was always chanting, "Little Stella, little Stella, come back soon again, little Stella." When she first knew Frederick it whispered softly, "Little Stella, little Stella, his heart beats for you, little Stella." When he asked her to be his it carolled merrily, "Little Stella, little Stella, golden sunshine, little Stella." And now to-night its burden was, "Little Stella, little Stella, love him truly, little Stella." And as she fell asleep its song was still "Little Stella, little Stella, love him truly, little Stella." And when next morning she had been made his wife, and he and she came down the path where the graves grew green and the dark yew waves, its voice yet mingled with the bell's sweet chime and sang, "Little Stella, little Stella, love him truly, little Stella."

CHAPTER IX.

THE ORPHAN.

IT was a dingy little room, and yet some attempts had once been made to make it pretty. On the rickety table, which looked as if it were longing to sit down and be a chair, there was a toilet cloth with a modest frill. A small white vase, with a few faded flowers in it, stood on the chimney-piece. Some brightly-tinted cheap prints of good pictures gave colouring to the soiled grey paper on the walls. These were the scanty little bits of smartness ; all the rest was dreary, without

any relief. The strip of carpet by the bed was so narrow that it must certainly have shrunk up out of a wish to get away from the cold lime and sand floor. The cold ashes in the grate had huddled themselves sulkily into one corner, as if they had made up their minds never to hear again the name of fire. The ceiling was marked here and there with damp stains, as though it had been crying over its own dirt. The washing-jug had but half a handle. The few articles of woman's dress lying about were neatly folded up, but very patched and threadbare.

All these objects were dismal enough; but the morning light, as it peered in at the window, saw two things in the room, yet sadder and more forlorn than any of these. In one corner there stood a plain closed coffin, which, to judge from its size,



must have held the body of a woman ; and on a low seat by it was a boy asleep, with his head resting on the lid. He was a very handsome little fellow, about nine years old, with delicately cut features of a southern cast, and dark eyelashes and eyebrows, though his light brown curls were those of a true Saxon. He had evidently fallen into a heavy slumber, worn out with crying, for his cheeks were very pale, and the long black lashes which rested on them were still wet.

He slept on quietly through every sound without ; slept while the large raindrops, thrown from the powerful sling of the north-west wind, dashed against the window-panes ; slept while the awakening tide of life began to thunder afresh through the busy streets of Bristol ; slept while shrill-voiced men and women cried fish and

oranges ; slept while a neighbouring church-clock told the quarters in an important tone, and played each time a few bars of a merry tune, as being glad to think it was getting on with its day's work ;—through all this the child slept.

There he lay, with the grey light of a November morning gleaming in upon him, his little hands clasped as though he were dreaming of prayer, his bright young head resting on the sign of mortality. A town sparrow, with smoke-begrimed wings, came and perched on the window-sill outside, and chirped as if it wished to lull his slumbers. On a shelf over his head were a small work-box and a worn leather ball, telling silently how busy she had once been, and how merrily he had played beside her.

At length some sudden noise in the house awoke the boy ; and, sitting up, he looked



around at first bewilderedly. Then, memory coming fully back to him, he began again the wail with which on his lips he had fallen asleep : “ Oh ! mammy, mammy, can’t you ever come back again,—oh ! mammy, mammy, can’t you ever come back again ?—oh ! mammy mammy ! ”

The landlady of the house now came into the room in a brown stiff dress, and a rebellious cap which would not stay on her head without being reminded of its duty by constant twitches of its strings. “ Lord save us ! ” she cried on seeing the boy.

“ Why, Armine, my dear, I thought you was in bed with my Tommy. Just to think of a child biding all night by a corpse. It’s enough to put a body all over in a tremble.”


“ I tried to lie still, but, when I got half asleep, I thought I heard her voice calling me, and so I dressed myself and came back

here," answered the boy, lifting to her face his wonderful dark eyes, which looked as if the story of his future life must be written somewhere in their hidden depths.

Was it a story of suffering? Was it a story of passion? Was it a story of joy?

"But what hav'ee been doing all night, in the name of goodness!"

"First I folded up nicely all her things, as I used to see her do. They were lying scattered about the room, you know. She would not have liked that, I am certain; and so I did it, and all the while I was doing it I felt as if her hands were on mine, showing me how to do it neatly; just as when I was a very little child she used to put her hands on mine to show me how to hold them when I said my prayers. I wish I could always live in this room, I am certain I should be more likely to be good



here than anywhere else. I can see all the words she used to say to me written in and out among the lines on the paper, and then everything here seems so friendly."

"But you could not see the walls after your candle went out."

"Yes, I could see them just the same. I don't know how it was. Perhaps it may have been that mammy sent one of the angels with a light to me."

"Come down and have a bit of breakfast, my child," said the landlady, with a touch of the mother in her voice and tone. "This mortal life of ours is a dismal thing at the best, as no one do know better than I who have had eleven, and five of 'em down in the measles at once, and buried three, and one little dear now a-teething in the cradle. But the living can't find meat and drink and clothes in always mourning

of the dead. So do'ee come down and eat a bit. You'll be the better for it, my dear, I know."

Her words reminded the boy that he was hungry. He let himself be led down stairs and ate with the appetite of a child, though his tears were flowing all the time.

"When do'ee think, my dear, your uncle will come?" asked the landlady; who, now that her kindly instincts were satisfied in seeing the child eat, was beginning to be curious and anxious about certain small matters, such as rent and the like.

"I don't know—I have not heard from him."

"And what sort of man is your uncle? Is he a well-spoken gentleman, and does he keep a servant or two, and a horse and trap?"

"I never saw him, and don't know any-

thing of him. Mother used to talk very seldom about him, though she wrote to him sometimes, and I found his address in her blotting-book."

The landlady sighed and glanced rather uneasily at the fourth slice of thick bread and thin butter which the boy had just taken from the plate provided for the family breakfast. She was glad the poor child could eat, but then her own had such large appetites, and butter was fifteen pence a pound, even the Dutch, and she could not afford to do as she should like to do if she were a lady with ten thousand a year.

Little Armine, having finished, folded his hands and whispered his grace; then he thanked the landlady simply for his breakfast, and crept away again upstairs.

"You mark my words, ma'am," said the

landlady to a neighbour, who just then happened to come in to take a pinch of morning gossip. "That child won't live to grow up; no child that talks as he do ever do. It was a wisht job enough when I went up and saw the mother—poor thing!—lying cold and stiff, and the blood from the vessel she had broken covering the bed-clothes, and looking so ghastly like. The poor little chap found her so when he came in from doing some errand in the town, and he ran down to me screaming like wild as I was peeling potatoes in the back kitchen at half-past nine in the morning. Well, but there now, 'tis all over. I be glad, poor soul, she be took before him—if only I can get my little bit of rent, and a trifle more for taking care of the child. I'm not a screw nor a skinflint, as you, ma'am, and all the street do know

and can say with truth, but a woman is obliged to look sharp when she has a little family. How thankful, ma'am, I ought to be—didn't I?—that all this didn't happen two months before baby was born!"

Meanwhile little Armine sat waiting for the time when they would come to take her body and lay it in the earth. Gone, gone, said the clock which ticked in the kitchen downstairs. Never, never, repeated the raindrops, as they dripped from the leads. Where is she?—where is she? moaned the wind in the chimney. The withered flowers in the vase bent towards him, as though they thought they could tell him something about her. The window-curtain rustled like the robe of a spirit bringing news of her. That cloud hurrying so quickly across the space of sky which could be seen between the

high houses of the street must surely bear tidings of her that it would let drop on his window-sill. It was still impossible to him to believe that no word, no sound, could come from her any more.


And now there were footsteps on the stairs, heavy footsteps, but footsteps which trod slowly and carefully, as though they wished to muffle their own sound. He knew what they were coming for, and stretched his little desolate arms towards the coffin, and threw himself upon it with kisses and a fresh burst of tears. But quickly the gallant spirit of the boy raised him up again. Had she not always told him a man should be strong? These strangers should not find him sobbing like a girl. When the door opened the child stood silent and still beside the dead. The men, rough but kindly fellows, who had

come from the forge, the timber-yard, and the mason's trowel to do this last service for a lonely widow, looked in wonder and pity at the boy whose face was so calm though his cheeks were so wet ; and one, who had a son of Armine's age, laid his horny hand softly on the child's head.

Soon they had borne their burden down-stairs out into the rain, which was now pouring down steadily. The worthy landlady had made up her mind not to let the child mourner go alone, but walked beside him, careless of her only black dress getting wet. Through the great city the little funeral wound its way ; past the railway station, where the engine fumes and pants, and the heavy omnibuses lumber up noisily, full of busy people ; past the church, where the shadows fall thoughtfully, and faces of holy men look down from mellow-tinted win-

dows ; past the shops, where the many-coloured silks shimmer, and the rich furs nestle cosily, and the red gold gleams bright ; past the quay, where the ships come and go, and the merry sailors shout ; past the hotel, where the gentlemen smoke around the door and talk about the favourite for next year's Derby, and the waiters look complacently out at the rain from the snug coffee-room ; past the carriages, with their liveried servants and plate-glass windows, where gaily-dressed ladies recline among soft rugs, and discuss the newest shape in mantles as if it were the most important thing in life : past all of these went one small heart, alone in its own great sorrow !

And now they had left the town behind, and were going up over the open down. The child's grief sat lighter here than before. It seemed to him as if the grass




which wept the raindrops, and the wind which passed sighing by, felt for him more than the men and women he had lately been among. Just then the clouds and rain suddenly cleared away, and a gleam of sunshine fell across the green slope in a bar of light. As he looked at it there came into the boy's mind the remembrance of the angel's shining ladder, and it was to his childish fancy as though this were the bright staircase by which his mother was going up to God. When he entered the cemetery where the cypresses wave, kissed by the fresh breeze from the distant sea, that radiant pathway was still before his eyes, and spoke to him of the resurrection and the life. When he stood by the grave he did not see her there, but mounting ever up the golden road.

The service was over. The curtain of



mist and storm had again wrapped everything in its thick folds. The child mourner sat again in the quiet room. He was alone again now, and very dreary. The evening came. The shadows crept around her empty chair, and fell athwart her bed, and hid her tiny mirror on the wall. But friendly sleep came soon to the help of the tired little body, worn out with long watching. He dreamt he saw his mother standing at the top of that glittering stair, and smiling at him and beckoning lovingly. It was his angel brought him down that dream; we know it, for He said that each of these his little ones has an angel before the Father's face in Heaven.




CHAPTER X.

MOTHER AND SON.

IT was a moist day, such as is seldom seen out of the hill country in the West of England. There was falling a sort of light fairy rain, no larger than the points of the finest needles, which tickled the backs of the cattle, and frisked airily around the leaves of the trees, spreading over them a delicate damp covering, and, like the feet of dancing sprites, left no trace on the earth.

On some of the highest-lying ground in North Devon, and full in the midst of this

light brigade of the mighty storm army, there stood an old grey house. Years ago it had been the dwelling of a race of small country squires, and many a Christmas gift had gone forth to the poor from its doors, and many a merry chorus had rung out on the breeze from its windows; but now it was only a farm-house. Except for the fact of the high-road and telegraph wire running close by it, and giving a touch of civilization to the spot, it was a dreary-looking place enough. The Summer-house, where the former master had smoked his pipe on warm August afternoons, was now nothing but a few worm-eaten planks. The little herb garden of the good dame was a mass of tangled weeds. In the belt of shrubbery the trees had wound their unpruned branches into the most fantastic festoons of many-tinted foliage. The



woodland god who had once stood in the middle of the lawn, and who had been the joy and pride of the worthy lady of the house, because she heard it was like what the grand folks had in their pleasure-grounds, lay scattered about in fragments among the long grass.

The inside of the house was much like the outside. The vast kitchen fireplace, where huge faggots used to blaze and crackle, now yawned a black cavern, with only a handful of smoking embers in it. The cupboards, whose shelves were once filled with jars of preserve, could now show nothing but a goodly array of cobwebs. The two large oak-panelled parlours looked cold and bare, with only a little shabby modern furniture scattered about them. Many of the bed-rooms, of old so neat and trim and lavender-scented, were to-day

play-grounds for the rats and mice. The tiny passage casements, which used to peep out so coquettishly between the creepers, were at last completely overgrown by them.

In one of the oak parlours just named there sat, on the afternoon of this damp day, a man and a woman. The man was about forty, and handsome, though with an unpleasant sort of handsomeness. His figure was tall, and very slender and graceful for his age; but there was in his quick, light, stealthy movements something uncomfortably like the panther, who now plays in the jungle, and now springs upon his prey. He had a peculiar way, when he was talking, of half dropping his eyelids, as if he were sunk into a lazy reverie, and then suddenly lifting them, and fixing his bold black eyes keenly on his companion. Though

his dark hair and whiskers were very thick, his chin and upper lip were both closely shaven, so that the well-shaped mouth and regular white teeth were seen to advantage. But the most remarkable thing about that handsome mouth was the bitter cynicism of the smile which so often hovered around it. It was the sort of smile which may have curled the lips of La Rochefoucauld in his worst moments. That smile often told truth about the man's inmost nature, which the half-closed, subtle eyes were doing their best to hide.

The woman was much older. There was in her face that sort of shadowy, indistinct likeness to her companion which we so often find in the looks and also in the voices of men and women of the same family, and which showed her at once to be his mother. The expression of her

features was, however, different from that of her son. No one could look at that once beautiful face and doubt that unconquerable pride and strength of will were woven into every fibre of the woman's nature, though for many years every line of it had been schooled into a studied, elaborate calm. The most striking thing about her was the contrast between her white hair and thick white eyebrows, which were those of a grandmother, and her black eyes, which still had in them all the keenness and fire of early youth. Her grey dress and plain cap were rigidly simple, and almost like those of a Quakeress. On her lap was spread a large piece of coarse white stuff, at which she was always stitching, and which she was never seen without; and against the arm of her chair leant a crutch.

“I tell you what it is, mother,” said the man, rising and walking restlessly up and down the room, and looking as he did so like an uneasy hyæna wandering about his cage, “I am thoroughly sick of this Devonshire farming. It means just nothing but living in a vapour bath, with the fly in the turnips, having your hat blown off and your hayrick blown down, selling mutton cheap and buying it dear, and waking every second morning to hear that your best cow has broken her leg. Let’s throw it all up at once, and be off to some of our old haunts on the Continent. People will have forgotten all our shortcomings by this time.”

“When you speak of the misdeeds of your past life, Norman,” she answered, speaking in a severe voice, though her eyes followed him admiringly about the

room, as they had been following him ever since he was born, "you should not use the word 'our.' I have always tried to be to you a lighthouse upon a rock, but you have not chosen always to steer through the troubled waves of this world by that light."

"It's quite true, mother, that you have always kept famously trimmed a lamp of prudence, by which I should have seen your interest and my own a good deal better than by the uncertain gleam of the many will-o'-the-wisps I have been running after all my life," he answered, with a touch of strong irony in his tone. "But surely the brilliant reflectors of your brain must show you that we are only losing money here—regularly throwing so much good cash into red west-country mire."

"Yes, that is true; but I don't see how,

with the gentlemanly tastes in which you have been trained, you could live on the pittance that is allowed us, without doing something to make a little money besides."

"I shall certainly never turn up any gold with a ploughshare. Indeed my efforts to make money have never been crowned with the success they deserved. I have, as you know, tried to pound it out of the apothecary's pestle and mortar, and to squeeze it out of a lawyer's parchments, and to dig it out of my own brain in literature, and even to get a few grains of the precious metal to stick to the tradesman's scales, but it was all of no use. The only way I ever found to coin a little ready money was with the dice, and then my friends were unkind enough to say it came to me unfairly. The fact is, I suppose, that I was, as you say, brought up with

such gentlemanly tastes that I was meant to be nothing but a gentleman at large. Don't you think you could write a wheedling letter, mother, to the old one, and get him to spring a few hundreds on our allowance, so that I could be a man at my ease?"

"I will never put pen to paper to write to him after his many insults," cried she, with a fierce flash in her eyes. Then controlling herself, she added in her usual measured tones, "If Philip Oakleigh on his death-bed should repent the wrongs he has done me, and leave in his will some substantial sign of that repentance, I will accept it. But while he lives no written or spoken word shall pass between us."

"The unblushing injustice of the whole thing drives me almost wild when I think of it!" he cried. "There will be Frederick Oak-

leigh, the son of a beggarly country parson (born to weak tea and tallow candles), wearing his diamond studs, driving his four-in-hand, and drinking his iced champagne. And there shall I be, the son of Mr. Oakleigh of Oakleigh Hall (born to travel with my courier, and to eat salmon every day in its season), drinking small beer, and turning my old coat as an apology for a new one."

"Frederick Oakleigh will never find the wealth which is not rightfully his, and which, without doubt, he has gained by mean arts of deceit and flattery, bring him happiness," said she, folding her hands with the air of a martyr prophesying from the stake. "He was married a little while ago, was he not? Poor young woman, I should be sorry to be in her place!"

"I hear she is the prettiest girl in all

Devonshire. But what do you think the foolish fellow has done? I heard it the other day in town, and forgot to tell you. He has actually gone off to South America, to look for butterflies or some such thing, and has taken his wife with him to help him in the chase. Suppose a fever (all hot climates have their fevers, you know) should make her a young widow. It might be a lucky chance for us, for then the old boy would perhaps let some of his gold run back in its right channel, which leads to my pocket."

"Some judgment is certain sooner or later to fall on Frederick Oakleigh. But we must not forestall in thought even the decrees of Providence," answered she, turning up her eyes, though a fiendish smile lurked for a moment round her mouth at her son's last words.

“And a father is able in this way to cast off his own flesh and blood, simply because a few words more or less were not mumbled by a priest; and because a few legal forms were not gone through. Right and wrong in this world are strange things, by my faith!” and he laughed a bitter, scornful laugh.

“But there was a certain religious ceremony,” she exclaimed.

Her expressive face, which in her youth had been well trained on the stage to change at her will, wore a look of proud, injured innocence—though the way in which she grasped her crutch and emphasized her words by rapping the floor, gave much more the idea of an angry old woman, who was in a rage at the remembrance of having been for once completely outwitted.

Her son did not seem much to heed either her mock or her real emotion. Norman loved his mother as much as he could possibly love anything but himself, but he was never in the least taken in by her; and as for her storms of temper, he had weathered too many of them in his life to pay them the smallest attention.

"If you wanted to pass for Mrs. Oakleigh, you should never have married Papa Brinkworth," he said, in no very respectful tone. "It was the worst move you ever made. It was sure to be disastrous to our cause."

"What could a lonely woman, such as I was then, do but seek a protector?" sighed she plaintively.

"Oh, hang it!—you were well enough able to take care of yourself, old lady," was the not very filial rejoinder.

“And besides, you ungrateful boy,” went she on, half whimpering, “you know I did it a great deal for your sake. Mr. Brinkworth was at that time a moneyed man, and my chief reason for marrying him was, that I might be able to bring you up in a way which our miserably small means would never have allowed of.”

“Your chief reason for marrying was, in reality, that you were as deeply over head and ears in love with Brinkworth (heaven knows for what, unless it was for his patent-leather boots!) as ever any Chloe of sixteen was with her Strephon. You found out your mistake before a week of married life was over, I know, and wished you could be off your bargain. I remember it all, though I was only a boy of twelve. My dear mamma sharpened my wits early in such matters.”

"Norman, can you talk like this to your mother?" she cried.

In those few words there was feeling, and no acting. This woman was a mixture of vast hypocrisy and strong passions; and of these one of the most powerful was her love for her son. He knew it, and was touched.

"I did not mean to be unkind, mother," he said, taking her hand and looking rather softened, as he did now and then when he spoke to her. "I know you are the only friend I have ever had. But when I talk about the great injustice done me, I get so mad with rage that I hardly know what I say."

"A day will yet come for requital, my son," said she, stabbing, as she spoke, her needle into a ball of cotton which lay on her lap, while a wicked smile, beginning at

the corners of her mouth, spread gradually over her whole face, making her look as if an evil spirit, not akin to Prudence, had just kindled his lamp in her soul.

"I fear it will be a long time coming," he answered gloomily. "But there's no use in thinking so much about the matter," he went on, trying to speak more lightly. "It only spoils the digestion. Now let us talk of something else. I suppose I must go and fetch this boy of poor Emily's?"

"Don't bring him here," said the mother sternly. "Apprentice him to a sausage-maker, or any other trade you like, only don't bring him here. I can never forget that his mother disobeyed me. Besides, she was a poor weak thing, and never had one spark of my spirit in her, and no doubt he is like her."

"The devil take me if I can consent to

treat poor Emily's boy quite as badly as that!" cried he, with something like true feeling in his tone. "Why, I used to carry her about when she was a baby! No, I can't do that. I will bring him here. We want a boy on the farm, and he won't cost much to keep."

CHAPTER XI.

PAST AND PRESENT.

THESE seem to be unpleasant people. Who were they? That can soon be told. A little more than forty years before this history begins, Philip Oakleigh, Frederick's uncle, was left a rich young widower without children. Soon after his wife's death he crossed the Atlantic for a long tour in America. In New York he met Eleanor Archdale, a young actress, whose beauty and talent were making her the talk of all the clubs and envy of all the drawing-rooms in the American capital.

The English widower, who was by no means inconsolable, soon fell desperately in love with her ; and she, knowing him to be a man of fortune and position, and perhaps liking too his handsome face, favoured him beyond all her other adorers. She kept him for some time dangling after her, her object being to make him marry her, and to this he at last seemed to agree.

The man, however, for once outwitted the woman. Oakleigh contrived that the marriage should be a sham one, but it was a very long while before Eleanor discovered this. For several years he did not wish to leave her ; this woman's power of enthralling was so great that she kept the most fickle of men her willing slave. Their son Norman was brought up as the legitimate heir to Oakleigh Hall, and indeed at that period his father more than half thought

of leaving him his whole property, which was not entailed.

At the end of ten years, however, during which he stayed in New York, because, perhaps, he did not quite like to face his English relations with the actress at his side, business forced Oakleigh to go home for a little time. He was now just beginning to get rather tired of Eleanor, and to think that her love of power was something more than the pretty imperiousness of a spoiled beauty, so he persuaded her to stay behind in New York. While he was away from her he grew to care still less for her, partly because he was out of the influence of her eyes and tongue, and partly because a neighbouring baronet, an old friend of his, had a very pretty daughter. To make a long story short, Oakleigh married the young lady, and wrote to Eleanor, making

known to her that she was not legally his wife, but adding that he settled on her and her son four hundred a year, as well as the house in New York in which they lived.

Immense, of course, were Eleanor's rage and astonishment; and of course she tried by letters to make mischief between Oakleigh and his young wife; but finding that the false marriage made her cause hopeless, after a time she gave up persecuting him any further.

A successful gold-digger, called Brinkworth, fresh from California, was just then making himself the talk of New York by his wild extravagances. This man was one of the most bold, swaggering, reckless rascals that ever lived. His daring, unscrupulous nature had an inexplicable attraction for Eleanor Archdale, and her son

only spoke truth when he said she fell over head and ears in love with him. He asked her to marry him, partly, no doubt, because both her house and cellar were splendidly furnished, and she became his wife. As may be supposed, she repented of her folly before the honeymoon was over. For some years she and Brinkworth lived together what was not exactly the life of angels. He spent all his own money, and as much of hers as he could get hold of, perfected her son in all sorts of evil, and at last drank himself into his grave.

Mrs. Brinkworth, now left a widow, found herself poorer than she had been before her marriage, inasmuch as her husband had sold her house and everything in it. Fortunately for her, though he had spent her income, he had not been able to touch her principal; that Mr. Oakleigh,

foreseeing the probable contingency of her one day marrying a rascal, had had too tightly tied up. Far, however, from being grateful to her old lover for this his care for her, Eleanor now resolved to begin again her persecution of him. To carry out this plan the better, she put on the grey dress and white cap, trained her face into that studied calm, and assumed the tone and manners of a respectable middle-aged gentlewoman of methodistical proclivities. Thenshe went with her son to England, and took up her position in the nearest town to Oakleigh Hall. Here she tried to get an interview with Mr. Oakleigh, but, finding that he evaded her, she showered upon him letters, requiring that he should acknowledge her and her son—or, at least, treble their income. He was now again a childless widower, and she thought

this promised well for her cause. At first Oakleigh paid not the smallest attention to these pricks from the female pen. He had adopted his nephew, Frederick, the son of his dead brother the clergyman. He knew that the false marriage made Norman's claims quite vain; and besides, though Eleanor hoped he had not, he had heard of her marriage with Brinkworth, which fact made him by no means leniently inclined towards his old love.

At length, however, irritated by the persistent way in which she went on worrying him, he wrote her two or three letters, not expressed in the most elegant words in the English tongue. Mrs. Brinkworth was much too proud to bear long these insults. She forced her way into Oakleigh's presence, told him roundly her mind, and then vowed never to write or

speak to him again ; a vow which, as has been seen, years afterwards she would not break—no, not to please Norman himself.

The mother and son now left England and wandered all over the Continent, not exactly treading in the paths of virtue as they went—though the mother made much ado about seeming before the world to walk straightly. She held to the quaker-like dress, the set look on her face, and the pious cant in her talk. These things had, somehow, become part of her.

Norman had been educated as a doctor, but, as he said, he tried as well, or ill, several other professions, and never went on with one. It was not that he was wanting in brains, but that he would not use them for any straightforward hard work. The fact was, he was one of that worst sort of rolling stones who not only don't gather

any moss, but pick up in their downward descent all the foul weeds they pass over on their way. His mother, who had spoiled him ever since he was born, and his step-father, who had so early misled him, were partly to blame, but his own nature had something to do with it too. He had in him an inborn love for creeping round about through slippery by-paths, even when a broad highroad to safe lodging lay before him.

Wherever they went, this mother and son were a riddle to those about them—she from the constant mask she wore, he from the subtlety of his character. Each was, however, thoroughly well known to the other, and when they were alone she, as has been seen, often dropped the veil which hid her inner self, and he spoke out his real feelings. The most inward kernel

of Norman's nature was a growing hatred and contempt of his fellow-men, a gloomy disbelief in everything good and true and pure. This was doubtless partly engendered by the blight that was cast upon his boyhood when he suddenly found himself changed from heir to the name and estates of Oakleigh into the illegitimate son of Eleanor Archdale, the actress. The heartless and shameful treatment of Eleanor and her son by Philip Oakleigh had very naturally produced a damaging effect upon characters ready enough to be biassed for evil.

When they had been some years upon the world, Norman had got into such awkward scrapes in most of the chief continental towns, that they thought it best to retire for awhile to England. Not knowing now what to do with himself, Norman re-

solved to take to farming, a trade he had not yet tried. He saw an estate in North Devon advertised to be let cheap, so he went, saw, and took it, but it conquered him. And there we find him.

There was another member of the Brinkworth family who has not yet been named. After her marriage with Brinkworth, Eleanor had a daughter, who was as different from her mother and brother as a dew-besprinkled primrose is from the artificial flowers that flaunt in a ball-room. As she grew up, the poor girl found the atmosphere of her home wholly insupportable; she therefore escaped from it as soon as she could by running off with a young Italian sculptor called Marani, who had won her heart. From that time she never saw again her mother, who had strongly opposed her marriage, and who throughout

her life had not given the daughter more than a fragment of her love, which was all lavished on the son. Emily, however, ceased not from time to time to write tenderly and imploringly to her mother and brother.

Poor Emily's path of love did not lead through smooth places. Though a man of some genius, Marani did not at first meet with success; body and mind grew sick with hope deferred, and he sank, as many an artist has done before and since, struggling against the waves of contrary fortune with the bright shore of success in view. At twenty-one Emily was left, with her little son at her side, to fight the battle of life, and for six years she fought on gallantly, getting a poor livelihood in Bristol for herself and her child by giving lessons in tradesmen's families in music and lan-

guages. But at last the tender frame gave way, and she followed her husband.

Then it was that little Armine, having as he told the landlady his uncle's address, wrote to him, telling him of his forlorn state; and Norman, stirred for a moment by a kindly feeling, went to fetch the child, and even paid his sister's small debts. The poor little fellow was glad to have some one to think of as a relation, but still he felt lonelier than he had felt even in the dingy room, as the train bore him further and further from the cypresses on the downs.


They left Bristol at night, and as the boy sat in one corner of the railway carriage, all around seemed strange and unreal. The smoke that rolled back from the engine appeared to him to wrap up in its dark folds shadowy pictures of the new

life to which he was going. The monotonous rumble of the wheels was always telling over and over again the stories of his past with her—stories of how they had been hungry together, stories of how they had been glad together, stories of how they had wept together. The stars, as he gazed up at them through the window, did not look to-night as they generally did, like mere bright twinkling lights, but formed themselves into indistinct characters, which his mother was writing for him in Heaven, but he could not make out. Even his fellow-travellers seemed in the half darkness phantom-like and mysterious. There was his uncle, sitting under the flickering carriage lamp, with his head thrown back and his eyelids closed, while now and then his face twitched as some vivid dream ruffled his sleep. There was the old lady oppo-

site, who was always falling into a doze but never staying in it, and whose wrinkled face and black bonnet with the crimson carnation outside seemed to be all one living head in the dim light. There was the gentleman with the bag full of papers, which, whenever he moved, rustled noisily, as though they had thoughts of escaping and flying about the carriage to whisper their owner's secrets. There was the lean man, who woke up at every station and asked, in an indistinct hollow voice, if it was some place the name of which sounded like a cabalistic word. There was the long man, whose legs were incessantly fidgeting as if they wanted to get out and take a walk without him. There was the fat man, who groaned in his sleep.

On they rushed ; across the marsh, where in Summer the milk-maids sit and

milk the patient cows in the middle of the fields, and the great rich cheeses are enthroned in long rows on the dairy shelves, but where now the wind keeps high holiday, stirring even the dull stagnant water in the broad ditches; past the old gabled manor-house, where the ghosts have not yet put on their sheets and come out for their walk; and where the skeleton branches in the avenue dance in the breeze as merrily as if they had leaves; past the town of trade, where the gas is still all ablaze, and flashes through the night; past the lonely churchyard, where death's mile-stones stand up silently; past the quiet village, where a few twinkling lights tell of some who watch and some who work; past the trim farm, where the snug hay-ricks stand lovingly around the house as though to keep it warm, and where the



sheep-dog barks petulantly at the train for wakening him ; across the battlefield where England's fate was once decided ; past the town of the lace-work spire, until at length it reached the town of the deep-voiced minster bell, sped the train that bore little Armine with his great sorrow ; then away from the main line, over fair Devon, ever rich and green, even when Winter's rough hand is upon the earth.

Sometimes the boy dozed a little, and then the papers in the bag came flying round him in swarms, as if they would stifle him, and the old woman's head wagged close to his, and the fidgety legs danced in and out between his own, and the cabalistic word and the groans of the sleeper mingled strangely together, and he woke with a cry and a start.

But the journey was over at last, for they had reached the station to which they were booked.

The sun had risen, and was looking like a bleared red spot in the morning mist, as Armine, at his uncle's side, drove towards his new home. The air felt raw, and as if it believed it ought to rain. The thin blades of grass shivered drearily. The ferns in the hedges hung down brown and dry. There was hope only in the tiny heart of a robin-redbreast, who, like the brave little preacher that he is, sat on a withered twig, telling everything to be patient and take courage, for Spring would by-and-by be here again.

His uncle spoke very little either to Armine or to his servant, a broad-shouldered, broad-tongued Devon man, who sat behind the dog-cart, glancing round now

and then at the small new gentleman, with that mixture of dulness and cunning in his face peculiar to the agricultural labourers of his own county and of Somersetshire. Norman sat leaning back in his usual lazy attitude, with his eyes half closed. A passer-by might have thought him at first a careless driver; but a second look would have shown him he was wrong. He had upon the reins that most perfect hand which is at once firm and light. The horse partook somewhat of his master's nature; he was a treacherous animal, who would trot along soberly for a mile or two with his head poked out, and then suddenly make a dart down a lane or into an open gateway, or lash out viciously, or set off cantering round an awkward corner; but, do what he might, his master was more than a match for him.

“Here’s the young un !” cried Norman, leading the child into his mother’s room before she was up. “Armine, this is your grandmamma, a dear and most truly respectable old lady.”

Mrs. Brinkworth put her bony hand under the boy’s chin, and looked at him for some moments with her black eyes glowing beneath her white eyebrows.

“The weak mouth of the mother and the dreamy eyes of the father,” she said at length. Norman, take him away and manage him yourself. I wash my hands of him.” So saying, she tapped the child’s head not very gently with her crutch, and lay down to sleep again.

CHAPTER XII.

MRS. PENLEWIN.

MONICA MIDHURST did not stay at Golden Mount long after Stella's marriage. Her aunt, Mrs. Penlewin, had always wanted her to live at home with her ; and partly devote herself to literary work, and partly to please the old lady who had long stood to her in a mother's place, she now complied with her wish.

Mrs. Penlewin lived at Wymmouth, a watering-place in the south of Devonshire. Her abode was a pretty cottage a little way from the sea, looking into a warm deep

lane, where, even in Winter, the birds sang and green mosses nestled, fed by soft rains which fall but to refresh. It was a prim little house. Not a weed dared show so much as the tip of its stalk in the small bright strip of garden in front. The paint on wicket-gate and window-frame was always clean and fresh. The tiny Summer-house seemed only meant for a dainty toy. The very flowers had caught the spirit of the place, and sat on their stems, looking demure and somewhat priggish.

The inside of the house answered to the outside. In the hall there were at least six mats, each waiting for its tribute of mud or dust from intruding feet, before the drawing-room could be entered. As for that drawing-room itself, who can describe the snowy crispness of the muslin curtains, the dazzling transparency of the china on

the chiffonier, the delicate chintz on chairs and sofas, the quaint primness of the old-fashioned clock on the chimney-piece. Spiders and flies fled from the house, giving it up as a bad job to try to fight against that mighty war-engine the housemaid's broom. There was not one speck of dust on the looking-glasses; though after all they were not wanted, for tables and backs of chairs could have well taken their place. In the kitchen the brightness of the pewter covers might have made even a hungry man pause to wonder before he removed them. The plates on the dresser looked so orderly a regiment that they might have been expected to file off at a word of command and march themselves to table. In the store-room, immortal preserves rose tier above tier, dried fruits lay sleeping like enchanted prin-

cesses in mysterious gaily-painted boxes, while piles of spices seemed to be calling out for tumblers of mulled wine into which they might jump, and even green peas and kidney beans, undying ones, mocked in their crystal homes Autumn and Winter as they went by.

But what was Mrs. Penlewin herself like? She was a little old lady, whose eyes at sixty were still as bright as those of a lively inquiring bird, whose step was still as light as that of a Peri, and whose figure was still as straight as an arrow. Mrs. Penlewin was always very fond of gay colours in her dress, and though she was a widow she still indulged in them. As her dear Penlewin was gone to a better place, she said, she could not at all see why she need go about in this world making herself ugly, and everyone else gloomy, with crape

and bombazine. Therefore, after a very short season of scanty weeds, she bloomed forth again one Sunday, to the scandal of her neighbours, in a red bonnet and blue dress.

The two fundamental points in her social creed were that during the working hours of daylight a woman should always be at home and a man never. The married state was, according to her, the right one for both men and women, and any who did not enter into it were, she thought, failing in their duty towards society. Though she had a comfortable income, and though she liked to see everything bright and pretty about her, Mrs. Penlewin nevertheless always studied the economical; and this not so much from a love of money as from an inborn passion for what she called doing things cheaply. She was very

fond of Monica, and in her inmost heart proud of her, but she thought her full of new-fangled fancies and high-flown ideas.

“And now, my dear,” began Mrs. Penlewin to her niece, as they sat at tea on the evening of the young lady’s arrival,—
“and now, my dear, I hope you are going to live quietly at home like a sensible girl, and to look out for a husband. All that I beg is that you won’t choose one without a profession. There’s nothing to my mind so dreadful as to have a man hanging about the house all day, poking his nose into everything which doesn’t concern him. Sometimes he’ll insist upon looking over the washing-bill, sometimes he’ll find fault with the maid-servants’ caps, and sometimes he’ll actually have the impudence to say how a pudding is to be made. Now what a different kind of man my Penlewin

was!" Mrs. Penlewin always spoke with much respect of that departed gentleman, though she would not mourn for him long outwardly in sables. "Why, he never so much as saw the hen which laid the eggs for his breakfast. He was away at his office all day, and when he came home he ate whatever I chose to put before him without making one remark upon it. That's the sort of husband you must try to get, my dear."

"But suppose no gentleman, either of this sort or any other sort, ever asks me to marry him."

"Now that, Monica, is talking simple stuff. Every woman in the world has her appointed mate, if she will only be on the look-out for him, and catch him when he comes. Yes, you're quite sure to get a husband; you only take care to fix him when you have got him."


“And how am I to do that, auntie dear?”

“Don’t you join a tribe of other idiotic women in stitching clothes for a parcel of niggers, who don’t want them, while the house-linen wants darning. Don’t you waste your time at afternoon tea, where ladies ruin their digestions, and talk about things they ought not to know the name of, while the cook at home is preparing steaks off a nightmare for the poor unfortunate husbands. Don’t you spend whole days in making a handsome church monstrously ugly, and like a tawdry dancing-room at a fair, while your own fireside is left without a smile to make it bright. These are the sort of things done now-a-days; but I declare that if I were a man, and my wife did any one of them, I would stew her to rags in the copper to get all the folly out of her!”

"I don't think I am very likely to sin in any of these ways," said Monica, smiling at the old lady's forcible deliverance of her mild wrath.

"No, I don't think you are, because I brought you up. You owe a great deal more to me, after all, than you do to Miss De Vellembie, with all her ologies and ieties. But, my dear, you're not eating anything; do have some of that apricot jam. I got the fruit quite a bargain. No one can use so little sugar and yet make such rich preserves as I do. Your dear mother and I had always a talent for cooking, like all Cornish women. I'm sure you must have it in you too, Monica. I want you now to turn your mind seriously to such things."

"My only attempt to make a cake had, you know, auntie, very much the same re-



sult as that of King Alfred," laughed Monica.

"My dear, Alfred was a man. This is really a very serious matter. I hope you will come into the kitchen to-morrow with me and learn how to make paste."

"Well, to-morrow, aunt, I shall be rather busy, I am afraid. I have Tennyson's new poem to read, and I want to finish a play of Euripides. Then I have the Latin exercises of the girls at Golden Mount to look over; Miss De Vellembie asked me to do it this half. Besides, I am going—the fact is, I mean," Monica thought she might as well come out with the truth at once, "I mean to begin to write a book."

"Write a—book!" reiterated Mrs. Penlewin, in wild astonishment.

"Everybody writes books now-a-days," rejoined Monica, rather apologetically.

"I can't think what ladies are coming to!" cried the aunt. "They read novels from breakfast to dinner. They go abroad and travel about alone, as if they were grenadiers at least. They won't sit in anything but an arm-chair, and loll in that; they drink Champagne like water; they talk about writing a book as quietly as, when I was young, I used to talk about hemming a pocket-handkerchief. They go to college and learn Greek and Latin. A woman learn Greek, indeed! Can Greek help to make button-holes, or to add up the week's accounts, or to Boil a Potatoo, I should like to know?"

"No, I don't suppose it can," answered Monica, somewhat confused for the moment by the old lady's straightforward logic.

"Besides," went on Mrs. Penlewin,

“men don’t like learned women. We women between ourselves know—and the men no doubt between themselves know it too—that we are really much the cleverest. We can skip lightly over awkward places where they go floundering about. But a man likes to seem to know the most in books, and to be asked imploringly by his wife how this long word is spelt, or how that pretty verse goes on which she has half forgotten.”

“If this be so, aunt, I will always remember, when I am with gentlemen, to talk about nothing but their buttons and the cookery-book.”

“You tiresome girl, you know that is not what I mean. Talk rationally, and like the sensible woman you are ; only don’t mix words of foreign gibberish with plain English, and don’t turn up your eyes and

go off into tirades about the moon and metaphysics, and heaven knows what else, as an American poetess did to whom I had the misfortune to be introduced the other day. If you will behave properly I can show you to-morrow the very husband who is, I am sure, appointed for you."

"And who is he? Do let me hear, aunt. I should like to know a little of my fate beforehand."

"He is Mr. Wilford, the new curate, a very nice-looking young man, who preaches beautiful sermons, and says my home-made curaçoa is as good as the real, or better, and has a family living in prospect. You will be Mrs. Wilford, I am positive, in three months."

"Please do let me see him, aunt, before we consider the thing as quite settled."

Perhaps, you know, I may not like the colour of his whiskers."

"Neither his whiskers nor anything else outside a man matters in the least. Before you have been married a week you won't know whether his nose turns up or down."

"I hope he will be afflicted with the same comfortable conjugal blindness with regard to me also. It really won't be fair if he is not."

"Of course every man that is worth anything thinks his wife a beauty when he has had her a little while. But it's different in the days of courtship; then men always think more or less about women's looks. You must take a little trouble with your dress, my dear, when Mr. Wilford is going to dine here. I will come and help you." And the good lady glanced triumphantly at her own bright pink cap and mauve

gown in the mirror opposite, as though they were a sample of female taste which Paris itself might envy.

“Men are always so extreme in their ideas about ladies’ dress,” said Monica, hurrying off into generalities rather as if she did not wish either to accept or refuse the just-made offer of aid at her toilet. “They either wish to see us decked out like rainbows, or else their majesties are pleased with nothing but the veriest dowds.”

“Let me see, when shall we ask him? It shall be on Thursday; I think the hen will then have hung just long enough. We will first boil her and then roast her, and that will make her as juicy and tender as a this year’s pullet. You should remember that little contrivance for making old poultry like young, Monica, my dear, when

you keep house. I learnt it from my grandmother. For second course we will have a greengage tart, but be sure, Monica, you don't ask for any cream with it; it would be so awkward before him, for I can't possibly allow a bit, since butter is eighteenpence a pound, and I sell every scrap I can. Now I must run upstairs to see if the housemaid is going on with her work, and not dawdling to chatter at the passage-window with the boy in the garden. It is not always pleasant to have to be so constantly on the trot, but I like to do my duty by the poor girl. I have no patience with those ladies who are eternally whining about their servants. My belief is that good mistresses make good servants, all the world over."

So saying, the brisk old lady bustled out of the room, and Monica could hear her

feet pattering lightly and quickly as those of a girl as she ran upstairs.

“Dear old auntie!” thought Monica. “What a clear type she is of the old-world woman! How different her thoughts and feelings, and often even her very language, are from ours! I could laugh at three quarters of what she says, and yet I know there is sometimes sound truth in her talk. When she, the woman of the past, and I, the woman of the present, seem most at discord with each other, there often suddenly rings out a sweet note of harmony between us. Well, every age of the world must have its own people, I suppose. But this Mr. Wilford. Will he fall in love with me? Very likely he won’t. Why should he? and yet perhaps he may;” and she blushed and smiled and smoothed softly her rich wavy brown hair, one of her

prettiest points. "But how about my falling in love with him? That is quite another thing. I don't quite know what sort of man I should fall in love with. I don't even quite know that I mean ever to fall in love with anyone. If I could succeed in my art as a novelist I sometimes fancy that it would be wisest and happiest to keep my single state. It would want strength, but I think I have a deal of strength somewhere in me. But my doings are as yet only a dream—perhaps I shall never make it a reality. Well, 'we shall see what we shall see,' as the children say."

CHAPTER XIII.

LITTLE ARMINE.

IT was a dreary, dreary life that little Armine led at the hill-country farm. A spark of feeling, fanned up by old memories of his sister, had, it is true, warmed for a moment the heart of Norman Brinkworth—we will call him so, for though the name was not rightfully his, he had borne it ever since his mother married his step-father. He had paid the small debts poor Emily had left, and had taken her boy to his home. But quickly that weak flame which

burnt for good had died out, and the man was his own evil self again.

Little Armine tried hard at first to attach himself to his newly-found relations. He was so lonely, and wanted so much some one to love. But when he tried to cling to his uncle he felt instinctively that it was like endeavouring to catch hold of a cold slippery fish; and when he sought to draw near his grandmother with pretty fondling childish ways, he felt just as instinctively that he might as well caress a stone. Not that they positively ill-treated him; it was rather that the boy understood he was somehow always far off from them.

His uncle made him do the work of a small general servant on the farm. Sometimes through a whole day he would walk up and down the same field, leading the horse which drew the plough, with a dense

wall of fog around hiding the sun, hiding the cheerless sky, hiding the free glory of the distant hills, hiding even the pale green of the wintry hedges. He could see nothing but his own shabby jacket, and the red soil beneath his feet, and Blackbird's good tempered sleepy head at the side. Then he would think how different were the bright pictures she and he used to draw of his future, in the happy old days, a future which seemed now to his young mind to stretch out endlessly before him; until at last, as he led the horse home, and the man who had followed the plough loitered far behind, and he knew no one could see him, the little fellow threw his arms around Blackbird's sturdy neck, and, hiding his face in Blackbird's shaggy coat, cried as if the sun could never shine again.

Sometimes the mighty spirit of the east

wind having breathed in the night upon the earth, everything would be found in the morning turned into stiff cold silver, each flexible twig, each wavy blade of grass, each glistening leaf of the evergreens. Then he would trot at Blackbird's side along the road, with the horse's hoofs ringing loudly upon the hard ground, and the heavy cart lumbering noisily behind. The branches of the trees appeared to him to beckon like white arms, telling him silently to come to them, for even they had warmer hearts than those who waited for him in that gloomy place he now called his home.

Sometimes the rain poured down, turning the road into rivers and the lanes into streams of liquid red mud, making the meadows vast green sponges, drenching again and again the plants, until at last

they woke for a moment from their Winter's sleep, and sent forth faint, drowsy scents, showing that they had been dreaming of the Spring. Then he would grind turnips in the shed for the sheep; and when a hot tear—as sometimes it would—fell on the cold iron of the machine, it seemed to him, as it turned, to grunt out, in a rough, jerking way, "Don't cry; there's no use in it. Be a man—be a man!"

Next he would go to feed the cows, standing side by side in the warm clean shed, their Winterhome, which their milky breath filled with sweet air; and as they looked at him with their large eyes, he felt sure that they meant to say they were sorry for him. Now and then Wallflower, his favourite, she whose deer-like head and the orange lining of whose ears told of her

Guernsey descent, would low softly as he drew near.

Could she, he wondered, be telling him about the manger at Bethlehem, and bidding him, for the sake of those dear truths his mother taught him once, be patient and be brave?

Patient and brave he was in the main; and at times, on these wet days, he managed even to snatch some minutes of real keen delight. His grandmother and uncle were, he knew, safe in doors. The men were thrashing in the barn. Stealthily, quickly, the boy crept up the ladder into the hay-loft. In the snuggest corner there lay a bundle of sweet soft hay. On this he seated himself, and taking from his pockets a strong knife and a bit of deal, began deftly and carefully, with a hand into which something of his father's skill had

already come, to shape the wood into a tiny boat, with taper fairy mast, or a bunch of fruit, or a miniature of Blackbird's head. The bright-eyed little mice scampered by his feet, making merry journeys from hole to hole. The pigeons, whose home was near at hand, strutted in at the window and pecked a few grains, talking in their solemn, important voices as they came and went. But the child-artist neither saw nor heard, as he sat bending over his work, scarcely breathing in his eagerness. For that brief space his uncle, his grandmother, the leaden sky outside, the pouring rain—all were forgotten.

The men and boys who were Armine's companions in his work on the farm felt at once the difference between themselves and him; and when he came among them, with his half-shy, half-proud manner, always

treated him gently, nay even almost respectfully. No doubt the men wondered to their wives at home how their master could put such a pretty child to do such rough work, and no doubt also the boys laughed behind Armine's back at the ignorance he showed at first in country matters; but outwardly they did not molest him, indeed in general they seldom spoke to him at all. Thus what with his graceful childish fancy, which made him find sympathy in the animals, and even in inanimate things, and what with his waking genius, the boy's out-door life would not have been so unhappy, if it had not been for the thought that he was doing low, degrading work when he was meant for something higher; and for a constant longing after another and older mind, which might help him to open his own.

But in the house he was miserable enough, and that especially in the long Winter evenings, which were to the child seasons of gloom and almost of terror. When twilight fell, the large, scantily furnished oak-panelled parlour looked so chill and eerie. The single candle flickered as if it were frightened at the gloom around. The fire burnt sulkily, ashamed, no doubt, of its smallness in that wide chimney. The door creaked, as though spirit hands were shaking it. The corners were full of shadows, which seemed met there to plot some dark mystery that before morning would make itself plain in some unexpected horror.

Worst of all, on each side of the boy sat his uncle and grandmother, the one lying back in his chair as if asleep, the other sitting upright and always stitching, stitch-

ing, though her eyes would incessantly wander from her work and fix themselves on Armine. The child would sit listening to the sound made by the needle as it pricked the coarse stuff, to the rattling of the door and the moan of the wind, until the fancy would come upon him that those eyes were scorching him, and that his grandmother, like the evil fairies he had read of, was sewing up in each stitch a bit of the happiness of his future life, and he would hardly be able to keep from crying out and running from the room.

In the course of the evening his uncle, just when he seemed most sound asleep, would always suddenly start up to stare at the boy—so that, whichever way the poor little fellow turned, he met one or other of those two pair of black eyes, which were so alike, and yet so different—and would ask him, in a loud imperative voice, some strange

wild question about religion or morality. Had Armine been older these questions might have done him real mischief—they might have confused his ideas of right and wrong, and even have unsettled his faith; but, as it was, the simplicity of his age, and the state of uneasy fear he was in, made these poisoned shafts glance off from him quite harmlessly, and instead of trying to answer he only hung his head and pulled awkwardly at one of the few buttons left in his waistcoat.

Norman did not press him any further. His only object was to amuse himself, by teasing and bewildering the child; and so, after giving one of his low laughs, which sounded much as if a wicked sprite were making merry in the air somewhere near at hand, he threw himself back and again closed his eyes.

Sometimes his grandmother would call Armine to pick up a ball of cotton or a pair of scissors she had dropped, and would repay him by sharply pinching his cheek with her long skinny fingers, or by one of those unpleasantly playful taps on the head with her crutch, of which he had had a sample on first coming into the house.

It was a great relief to the child when he could at last escape to his own little bedroom upstairs. There he had, in a sort of way, grown friendly with everything. He had got to fancy that odd faces, some smiling, some frowning, peeped at him out of the large faded roses which covered the old-fashioned chintz of the bed-curtains. On the window-shutter there were a number of scratchings, in which he was always finding likenesses to the different maps he used to learn

from, in those happy days when he went to school. Then there was that fragment of a looking-glass nailed up above the chimney-piece; how amusing it was, and yet how weird, when the moon was shining brightly in at the window, to stand on a chair and see reflected in it half of his own little pale face, or disjointed parts of everything in the room.

Outside there was that wild, mysterious sound which was like the vibration of the string of a giant Æolian harp, and which at first had so much startled him. Very soon, however, he had found out that it came from the telegraph wires. He wondered a good deal about the words which went darting up and down that magic cord—words of hope, words of fear, words of sorrow, words of joy. Yes, there were happy people in the world, who were

always sending and getting messages ; but to him, the orphan, the lonely one, no message ever came.

Thus time went on, till Spring came through the land, treading lightly on the hill-tops, but setting her many-coloured footprints firmly in the valleys. The town-bred boy now found daily fresh wonders in all around him. First there were the tufts of fine yellowish down fringing the branches of the willow. As weeks passed by, there was the nest under the bough which he raised so cautiously, and yet so eagerly, to peep at the spotted eggs hidden warmly there, and afterwards at the callow brood, whose open mouths were always asking for a worm. There was the making into life of the countless insect-world, some dusky winged, some rainbow-tinted, some graceful in form, some of shape grotesque—all swarm-

ing in the air, the water, and the grass. There were the lambs frisking in the meadows, and always calling so importunately to their mothers. There was the vanguard of the gorgeous procession of the flowers; the arum queening it in the shady lane, the marsh marigold glowing on the stream's bank, the milkwort with hue as bright as the seas of little Armine's father's native south, the chickweed starring it gaily in the hedges in spite of its ugly name, the moschatel draping the fountain with airy green festoons of tiny blossoms, and the earlier ferns putting forth coyly their tender fronds.

On Sunday evenings Armine would now take long rambles. There was one cottage that he often went by and lingered near. In its garden there was generally on a Sunday afternoon, when the weather was

fine, a mother and a sickly child, who had been drawn out on its little couch to taste the fresh sweet air. The woman was plainly dressed, and her features were sun-burnt and hard, and the child was scarcely pretty. But her rough brown hand was so gentle when she touched the tiny fragile form, and the small pinched face brightened so when she drew near, little Armine grew to love that mother and that child, and to feel about them as if they were his friends, although he had never spoken to them, and did not even know their names.

Sometimes he would reach high ground, whence he could look over the sea, with the white-sailed fishing-boats floating lazily near the shore, and the great tall-masted ships gliding far off. He saw the sea-birds skim across the water, and wished vaguely that he could be one of them.

Now and then overcoming the childlike shame caused by his shabby clothes, he crept into a church, where the setting sun, pouring through the western window, lit up the form of One who stood among the sick and weak and healed them. But, wander where he might, his home was always the lonely house where the wind sighed drearily, and where the telegraph wires sounded their melancholy music, and carried up and down words of hope, words of joy—while to him, the orphan, the lonely one, no message ever came.

CHAPTER XIV.

FLIGHT.


THE hay was on the ground, and that made Mrs. Brinkworth and her son in a worse temper than usual. Their men were some sulky, some drunken, and all lazy. It was little wonder that this mother and son, who could not govern themselves, could not govern well their inferiors. Armine fared the worse at this period, like everything and everyone around them, and began to fear that his young life was in truth growing a burden to him.

One evening, when Norman had made

her more than commonly furious by his accounts of the goings-on in the hay-field, where, according to him, the men would do nothing but lie stretched at full length and pour cider down their throats, the old lady sent Armine to fetch her a glass of water, perhaps thinking that it might calm her spirits. Being frightened and flurried, as he always was when he did anything for his grandmother, the poor little fellow, when he came back into the room, did not notice that Mrs. Brinkworth, in her excited talk with Norman, had pushed her footstool far off from her. The child fell over it, and broke the glass and spilt the water. Hereupon the old lady gave him a ringing box on the ear, and told him that he was a useless fool, as his mother always was, and that he would be a disgrace to his family, as she had been. This was the first time,

with the exception of those playful raps with the crutch, that either his grandmother or his uncle had struck him, and it was the first time also that they had spoken ill words about his mother before him. His cheek burned with the blow, but his heart burned yet more with the insult to her he had so dearly loved and honoured.

That night, after he was in bed, the telegraph wires had at length a message for him. Run away ! they chanted ; run away ! and the wind among the leaves of the creeper at the window whispered the same words, and the owl who was looking for his family's supper, and was talking in a complaining tone about the trouble it was to provide for so many, took up the strain and hooted "Run away !—run away !" He thought of the misery of his



indoor life ever since he entered that house, and shuddered at the idea of another Winter with evenings like the last ; and as these things passed through his mind he felt any change must be for the better.

Besides, those words "run away" awoke up within him an instinct for wandering and adventure, which came to him no doubt from his father, who had had a touch of the adventurous about him. Then he remembered how his mother used to tell him her highest wish was that he should one day be a great sculptor, who would make the name of Marani famous ; and if he stayed here, he argued, in his simple, childish way, and grew up nothing but a farm-servant, that would be impossible. Those words of insult stung him and came now more cruel than ever to his brain as he repeated them over and over, and the boy's proud

spirit, his birthright from his Italian ancestors, who had been great soldiers and statesmen in the days when Sienna was in her glory, revolted at the notion of still serving one who had cast shame upon her worshipped memory.

All these thoughts went round and round a great many times in his mind, until at last he resolved to take the telegraph-wires' advice, and that very night to run away.


"I daresay they will hardly even send to look for me," he thought, "when to-morrow they find that I am gone. They will be angry, of course, but not because they really miss me or care for me. Uncle is always complaining that another boy would do double the work I do, and those dreadful eyes of grandmother's watch so closely every bit I put into my mouth that often,

though I am very hungry, I can't eat. I suppose there are some kind people in the world. Mother used to say there were a great many; perhaps I shall meet with a few of them. It will be funny and amusing not to know where I am going, if only I can earn a little money so as not to starve; if not, I suppose I must die and go to be with mother."

Thus thinking, he rose and dressed himself; he put into his pocket his chief treasures—a lock of his mother's hair, his faithful two-bladed knife, and a crooked threepenny-bit the landlady at Bristol had once given him for luck. He tied up in a bundle his few clothes, and some of his best bits of carving, which he had a notion he might sell. His last look at the room has been taken; he opens the door softly and steals out. He has lit no candle, because he

thinks it might betray him. The full moon, which had shone so brightly into his room will, he knows, dart in her friendly beams through the windows on the staircase and in the hall. Besides, the house is now so familiar to him that he can find his way about in the dark. The rooms of his uncle and grandmother have first to be crept by; these passed, he breathes more freely. Along the passage he glides, and down the stairs. Why will they creak so? They never do in the daytime. His timid eyes try to plunge into the shadows around him, and his ear is strained to listen; but he sees and hears nothing. He goes to the back-door, believing it the safest. He knows where the key hangs, and after feeling about for it for some moments, which seem years, he finds it.

But hark! that is surely a step on the



stone floor of the kitchen ! It would be dreadful to be caught ; they would punish him so severely. He shrinks into the nearest corner ; something cold touches his hand : he quickly feels that it is only the nose of Bessie, his uncle's black and tan setter. The patter of her claws made the sound he heard, and which his fear magnified into human footsteps.

"Good Bessie, kind Bessie," whispers the child imploringly, "don't make a noise, please. I am going to run away, because they are so unkind to me. You would run away too if you were ill-treated ; but he is good to you, and you were always good to me, dear Bessie !" And he hugs the dog, and her curly coat is wet ; then he lets her go, and Bessie, satisfied that it is only a friend on the move, trots back contentedly to her bed in the back-kitchen.


And now the key is in the lock. How hard it is to turn, and how weak the little fingers are ! When at length the door flies open he starts back as a cold puff of wind meets him. It feels so like the chill breath of the giant who is going to push him back into prison. Away across the yard, where the geese, roused by his footsteps, cackle as their foremothers cackled in ancient Rome, but Armine thinks most officiously and unpleasantly. Away through the gate, which falls to with a clap that makes him bound forward. Away up the lane, where the branches make him every minute tremble nervously by tickling his face. He is now in the high road.

But what is this tall white figure which rises up suddenly before him ? He stops dead short and cries out, while all sorts of tales about spectres and goblins hurry

through his brain. No, it is no ghost. It is a man in his shirt-sleeves, and, worst of all, it is a man he knows. He can see his face plainly in the moonlight. It is Tom Hobbs, one of his uncle's workmen. He thinks himself lost, but instinct makes him dart past the man and rush off at full speed. Tom has in reality no thought of following him. He is still so drunk that he had not recognised him. Aroused by the boy's footsteps, he had jumped up from a cider sleep under the hedge, and started a dim notion that he ought to go somewhere, and that a little figure had met and passed him. But this faint ray of thought quickly dies out in the thick fog of his intellect, and he sinks down again, and is once more snoring peacefully.

But Armine does not know this. A panic is upon him, which takes away all power of

reasoning, which will not let him even turn his head. On he flies, careless of spent breath and labouring heart. It seems to him that he hears footsteps behind him, and that there are voices in the wind. How pitilessly bright the moonlight is! It will not leave one shadowy place in which to hide. And now the gateposts, the milestones, the trees, everything, as soon as he has passed them, have surely joined in the pursuit. That church-spire, too, has taken up the chase and follows him with giant's strides, and the tombstones come leaping along around it, and at their head stalks the white form which stands with clasped hands on the lady's monument. The whole air becomes full of those terrible eyes of his grandmother. They glow on every side of him. He feels as if her bony hand were on his shoulder. In wild despair he runs down a nar-



row way which turns off the road into a field and falls insensible.

There was an orange flush in the east when Armine came to himself. He felt very cold and stiff with lying on the dew-drenched grass, and at first was very confused as to where he was and what had lately happened. But when he had risen and stretched himself and looked about, he gradually recollected everything. The quickly brightening light of morning kept his fanciful fears from coming back, but he saw that he was not much more than a mile from his uncle's house, and this filled him with not unreasonable uneasiness. He set off therefore at once, in the direction of Barnstaple. But he felt tired and weak, and could not make much way. Very glad was he when, by-and-by, the mistress of an early market-cart, a portly dame, with a

large red bow on her bonnet and a larger and redder face beneath it, took pity on his slight little figure and pale cheeks and offered him a lift.

The boy sat in the cart behind the good lady, who made her spicy little horse trot along merrily, and soon fell asleep among baskets of fresh bright strawberries, crisp lettuces still wet with dew, and pats of rich yellow butter, each lying on its own cool cabbage-leaf bed. When they reached the town, the dame set him down on the bridge, and parted from him with a hearty Devonshire "Good-bye, God bless 'ee, my child!" as she thrust two overflowing handfuls of strawberries into his lap.


His first feeling, as he stood looking over the parapet of the bridge into the swiftly-flowing waters, was that he wanted some breakfast. But how was that to be

got? He now bethought him of his carving. So he went into the streets, and with a courage that faltered, though it was spurred on by hunger, began to offer his wares to those he met and passed. A flaunting housemaid, who was cleaning a doorstep, bought a string of wooden beads, for the charitable reason that missus had some like them, and would be mad at seeing her wear them; and a dismal housemaid, employed in a like manner, bought a grotesquely ugly little carved head, for the original reason that it gave her the shudders to look at it. Both damsels seemed to regard it as a sacred duty to beat down the little "foreign" rascal, as they called him, on account of his dark eyes, and each only gave him twopence.

With this, however, the poor little fellow thought himself rich. He bought two

penny rolls, and, like the well-trained child of poverty that he was, laid by carefully the other half of his scanty earnings.

All that day the boy plodded on. Through air on which thyme and honeysuckle had shaken out their fragrant censers; between hedgerows where the wild rose blushed deeply; through villages where the blacksmith's hammer tinkled merrily, and where the patient saw glided drowsily on its way; beside the hayfields where men and women laughed and worked; before stately country houses where the long rows of conservatories flashed in the sunlight, and the velvet lawn sloped gently. The world around him was bright and lively and busy. But for him there were none who would call him to share their work, no smiles of friendly welcome, no places where he could turn in and rest. The sun beat hot upon



the dusty roads, and he felt very weary.

Towards evening he came to a field where a village festival was being held. The children were running about in their best clothes, shouting joyously, and pretty young ladies were playing with them. The child went timidly among them, and once more offered for sale his poor trifles. The young ladies looked down at them for a moment, and then turned away, tossing saucily their gaily-decked little heads, urged on to do more graceful charity among well-dressed children by the animating spur of two long-tailed curates standing by as spectators.

The men-servants at the great house glanced askance at him, shrugging their broad, idle shoulders, and observing to each other that very likely the little vagabond had something to do with a gang of Lon-

don thieves—an idea which made each of these heroes resolve internally to bolt well his own door that night, and to be afflicted with overpowering drowsiness should any unusual sound be heard in his master's dwelling. The boys jeered him for not having all his buttons, an insult which in Devonshire mouths has a double meaning, though poor Armine understood but half of it. He thought it alluded only to a deficiency in his jacket and waistcoat, but in west-country lingo the phrase denotes deficiency of brain.

But one lady who was older than the rest, and who wore a black dress, looked into his face with a sweet sad smile, and gave him a large piece of cake, whispering, as she turned away to the gentleman who stood near her,

“If he had lived to be as old, I think he

would have been something like that."


A friendly barn which stood with its doors wide open received the child that night, and he slept soundly among the straw, with the silver moonlight shining in upon him.

CHAPTER XV.

WALNUTS AND KNITTING.

ON the first evening of her return to her aunt's house, Monica Midhurst had, as has been said, foreseen the possibility of Mr. Wilford, the new curate, falling in love with herself, and that gentleman, helped to it by Mrs. Penlewin, through various invitations to her house, had, in truth, very soon performed this feat as truly and completely as ever young man did before or since.

When he was preaching, the question of what Monica was thinking, as to both his



matter and his manner, was sure to come rushing pell-mell into the middle of his sermon, making his voice tremble and confusing his similes. When he was teaching at the school, and the children in their spelling came to great M, that cabalistic letter with which both her names began, he would blush and stammer like the stupidest boy in the class. When he was exhorting some old woman who always had rheumatism in her legs, as soon as the church-bells began to ring, his hard sayings would at once suddenly grow soft, and his words would ramble about as if they had lost themselves—simply because he had caught a glimpse of a young lady's dress fluttering past the window. When he went to the cover-side on foot (the only approach to sport that public opinion in Wymouth would allow a parson), he was

always saying to himself that if he could be with Monica he would never go there again. When he mounted his high-stepping chestnut mare (not all the books the bishop's chaplain had heaped on him had been able to crush out of Charles Wilford his taste for horseflesh), he was always thinking how well she would carry herself in harness. She would be rather too spicy, no doubt ; but then Monica was not nervous like some women. In short, never was a young curate with a beard and broad-church views more entangled and wrapped up in any subject than he was in Monica.


The shrewd eyes of Mrs. Penlewin soon saw this, and she was both proud and pleased. There were, however, two points in the business which were not clear to her, and which troubled her a good deal :

how much did Monica care for Mr. Wilford, and why did not Mr. Wilford ask that important question which he certainly meant and wanted to ask? Many women would have set their minds at rest on the former of these points by putting their niece through an artful catechism, but Mrs. Penlewin's old-fashioned ideas about female delicacy forbade her doing this. So she waited, hoping from week to week for enlightenment on these subjects, but waited in vain.

At length, when things had been going on in this way for more than six months, Mrs. Penlewin felt it was her duty to interfere actively to bring matters to a crisis. She was sure people were beginning to talk about it—at least, the doctor's wife had looked unpleasantly at her, Mrs. Penlewin herself, last Sunday, when Monica

and the curate came walking up the church path together ; besides, long courtships were always bad things. Had not she and her Penlewin taken only six weeks from the day when his eyes had first made love to her—while his mouth was full of a pigeon-pie she had cooked herself—till the day when he put the ring on her finger ? Her cunning little scheme was soon formed.

One evening she asked Mr. Wilford to tea. Simultaneously with the cups and saucers leaving the room, Mrs. Penlewin remembered a startling fact—she had actually till that very moment forgotten to pickle any walnuts. Every year since she and her Penlewin first kept house she had always had a jar of that pickle, indeed she positively would not know her store-room without it, but she feared that by this time



the fruit would be grown too large. Perhaps, however, it was still not too late; she would go out that instant into the garden, and if the walnuts were still young enough, she would call cook and the servant-boy, and, as the evenings were so long now, gather them at once.

"Monica, my dear," went on Mrs. Penlewin, "will you, while I am out, put to rights my knitting for me? It tries my eyes so to pick up the stitches. Do, if you can, get it in order by the time I come in, for I must finish the shawl to-night for cook's grandmother, who is coming for it in the morning. I am very sorry to give you so much trouble, my love. It was so stupid of me to get it all wrong!"

So saying, the old lady handed her work to Monica with as artless an air as if she had forgotten that an hour ago she had

calmly and deliberately let two dozen stitches drop off her needles; and then, before her niece could speak, hurried out of the room.

“Now I have given him a fair chance,” thought Mrs. Penlewin, as she strolled down the garden towards the walnut-tree, on which, however, she fixed an abstracted look, that did not exactly answer to the eagerness about its fruit she had lately expressed indoors. “I don’t usually like meddling directly in such matters. Offers of marriage which are brought about in a hurry by manœuvring mothers and aunts are generally, to my mind, like forced sea-kale, which, boil it as long as you may, and serve it up as nicely as you can, with melted butter and toast, is almost always a failure. My way is to throw young people together as much as you can quietly, but

not pointedly, and then to leave them to work out their sum in love's arithmetic book. Some pairs will do it quickly, as I and my Penlewin did, and some will take a little more time. But these two have been so long about it that really I think it was right for me to help them. If Mr. Wilford were a bold man he would have seized one of the many opportunities he has had walking from Sunday-school with her, or meeting her in the town. But he is not bold; he is just like my Penlewin, who, if I only looked at him, used first to turn as red as a cherry, and then as green as a cabbage. I have noticed that Monica won't, if she can help it, be alone with him, and she does not give him as much encouragement as she might; but of course that is all girlish shyness. Mr. Wilford would, I am certain, never speak the word

if he thought he could be glimpsed at even out of a garret window while he was doing it. Well, now, in my drawing-room, with a new Brussels carpet, and a tea-chest on the side-table, and everything homelike and snug around him, he has a chance that meek Moses himself might have been satisfied with, and, if he does not take it, all I can say is that he is not worth having."

Meanwhile Charles Wilford seemed in some danger of bringing upon himself, in reality, this latter awful judgment of Mrs. Penlewin. That terribly active minute-hand of the clock he saw, to his dismay, had actually made good two of its twelve appointed stages since the old lady left the room, while he had been standing silent at the chimney-piece, taking up in turn every ornament upon it, as though he expected to find by-and-by under one of them a

talisman which would help him in his difficulties, conjured there by some friendly match-making fairy.

As for his goddess she sat in the window at the opposite side of the room, with her back half turned to him, under the pretext of getting more light, of which, however, there could hardly have been a scarcity at half-past seven on a bright June evening. All the while she was whispering to herself. When he first caught that sound his heart beat joyfully with the fancy that these low utterances were words of soft encouragement. But as he listened more intently those fond throbbings quickly ceased, for what she said was over and over again, "Two pearl and one plain, two plain and one pearl."

"Yes, she is a pearl," thought Wilford, his mind taking up confusedly the words; "but,

dear me ! it is not at all plain how I am to get her." At length, driven to desperation by glimpses of Mrs. Penlewin's bright blue dress hovering restlessly among the bushes opposite the window, and by the knowledge of what (from the glance the old lady gave him as she went out) he understood he was expected to have done before those ample skirts should come rustling back into the room, and by the thought that even an ice-bath was always better than shivering on the bank, the curate made a sudden plunge.

"Miss Midhurst," he cried, crossing the room and standing by her, "do you think you can ever like me a little?"

"I do already like you very much. We have always been friends, have we not?" said she, turning towards him and looking at him with her frank eyes, though her colour deepened a little.

"Oh, Miss Midhurst, you know that is not the sort of liking I mean."

"Is it not? I am sorry for that," answered she, gently looking at the trouble in his kindly face, sadly and a little remorsefully too. She had tried, she knew, to show him that she did not care enough about him to make it well for him to do what Mrs. Penlewin had now led him into doing. But, womanlike, she had been too much flattered by his homage, and too really anxious to keep him as a friend, to be able, on looking back, to absolve herself from all guilt of what the world calls flirtation.

"I know I am not nearly good enough or clever enough for you. But your aunt has always seemed to encourage me, and I thought I should like you once to know how—how—how I love and reverence and——"

It was so much harder work than even his first extempore sermon that here the poor curate fairly broke down.

"I should be but a bad bargain (as they say in Devonshire) for any man, believe me, Mr. Wilford," said Monica, trying to laugh, though in reality she was much more inclined to cry, partly because she liked him so much, and partly because she could not like him enough. "I wish you had tasted the plum-pudding my aunt insisted on my making the other day. I can assure you my hands went floundering about among the suet and raisins as clumsily as a couple of frogs might if they had been put into the basin; and as for cutting out a dress, I could as soon cut up an ox."

"But a housekeeper might be kept," suggested Wilford, faintly.

"And besides," she went on, "I am be-

ginning almost to think that no artist woman ought to marry."

"But perhaps, after all, you won't wish to be an artist woman. Your novel was returned this morning by the publishers, was it not?" said he, blurting out words which he had vowed never to breathe to mortal man or woman, and least of all to Monica Midhurst herself.

"What right, what business have you to know that, sir?" cried she, indignantly; and as Charles Wilford met the flash of her eyes he learnt that a man had better even question a single lady about her age, or a wife about her husband's short-comings, than a would-be authoress about those luckless first-born of her brain which are destined never to see the light.

"I believe—pray forgive—singular chance—so very remarkable," stammered

the unfortunate curate, who was in a horrible strait between his conscience not allowing him to take an unclerical leap from the path of truth, and his guilty knowledge of having promised the postman half-a-crown to tell him if the manuscript came back, because he fancied that if it did Monica might be perhaps thereby more inclined to matrimony.

“I see you have slipped by some by-road into my confidence,” said she, her temper quickly sweetened by pity for his extreme confusion. “But as you have got into it, there is no one I would so soon have there as Mr. Wilford.”

“Those are kind words. Let me go before you blot them out by some harsher saying.”

“We shall still always be friends, shall we not?” said she, holding out her hand as he turned to go.

He took it and pressed it to his lips.

“I wish”—she began, and then stopped. She was going to say, “I wish you could soon marry some one else,” but that instinctive jealousy which is natural to all women, and which often inclines even the best of them to be a little like the proverbial dog in the manger about their admirers, stayed the words on her tongue, and she changed her sentence into “I wish I could give you back what you have given me,” and added a glance which riveted the poor fellow’s chains more firmly than ever. Then, seeing this as she looked at him, she instantly repented of her naughtiness and went on hurriedly, “But as that can’t be, you must not any more think of me in that sort of way. And now good night. Don’t sit down like a child to whimper over a broken toy, but crush grief by good active work, like a man.”

He did not answer, for he could not have trusted his voice, but went out to school his simple, brave young heart to bear its first touch of sorrow.

"Is Mr. Wilford gone?" cried Mrs. Penlewin, coming into the drawing-room with her blue silk rustling eagerly, and her keys jingling inquisitively, and her red cap ribbons fluttering expectantly. She had not seen him go, because she had been in the kitchen.

"Yes, auntie dear."

"And what has he been talking about?"

"Nothing particular, auntie dear."

"What! do you mean to say the fellow has been such a milk-sop as to run away without making you an offer?" burst out Mrs. Penlewin.

"No, not exactly that, auntie dear."

"I see how it is," cried the old lady, who

had now got a view of her niece's face. "He has proposed, and you have refused him, for some ridiculous fancy that you are a woman with a profession. A young lady with a profession!—we shall hear of a young lady next with a sword and a gun!"

Good Mrs. Penlewin, looking as martial as if she had both sword and gun, left the room with a flounce, and fired off a bang of the door which made the china rattle.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE FOUNDLING.

THE days following that evening on which she decided poor Charles Wilford's fate, were not very happy ones for Monica. Mrs. Penlewin thought it her duty to be in a chronic state of ill-humour for a certain time with her niece. At breakfast the old lady was snappish, because Monica did not cut the ham properly. At dinner she made sarcastic remarks about the girls of the present day. At tea she descanted on the housewifery virtues of her own youth. The return of

her first novel, on which, like other young scribes, she had built up so many bright, vain hopes, was also the cause of many a secret tear to Monica.

Besides all this, it was anything but a cheering sight to see poor Charles Wilford, whose face was in general the very home of genial content, going about the streets as if everyone of his parishioners had lately gone into mourning, and to know, as Monica did know, that it was no funeral that was upon his mind, except of a marriage hope deceased.

One morning, however, a bright little spot dropped into the middle of this gloomy bit of Monica's life, in the shape of a letter, overflowing with sunshine, from Stella. It was written from the banks of the Amazon, up which Stella and her husband were slowly travelling. It told how odd

it was to Stella to think that the giant trees, and the many-shaped brilliant flowers, and the vast sea-like river, and all the other strange things which made her life seem like one long fantastic vision, were in truth realities ; while her old commonplace existence had grown to appear like a dream. It told how Fred was really a more crazy fellow than she had at first thought him, inasmuch as he spent his time raving about insects which were no bigger than a needle's point. It told how, sometimes when Fred was away, she cried a little over memories of kind Miss De Vellembie and dear, dear Monica ; but how, when he came back, she forgot them both (yes, actually both, however much they might turn up their noses), as soon as she had taken one good look into his face. It told how she was petted by the old Ger-

man professor, and, in short, by every member of the expedition. It told (most wonderful fact of all), that in a few months she, Stella, was to have a little baby of her very own, and was to go back to the nearest large town in order that this important small person might arrive more safely. Then the letter ran off into a full and exact account of what the tiny woman (Stella was positive it would be a tiny woman) would say to Aunt Monica, and of the way she would pull Grandpapa Sparshaw's white beard, and of the wild confusion she would make in Miss De Vellembie's study; and, finally, there was such a shower of kisses and loving messages to be conveyed by Monica to everyone at Golden Mount, down to the Persian cat, that they overflowed the paper inside and got on to the cover.

"Happy Stella!" thought Monica, with

a sigh, as she laid down the letter ; and might it not have been happy Monica too, if——But what a foolish, unsatisfactory little word that If is ! Then she repressed another rising sigh as not kind to Stella, and read through the letter once more, and rejoiced with her friend, as it was in her sympathetic nature to rejoice.

One evening, after a sultry, oppressive day, Monica strolled alone up the field which sloped behind Mrs. Penlewin's house, and which was the Summer home of that lady's fat white pony and her two pretty Alderney cows. She felt depressed. That day she had been employed in re-writing parts of her novel, and she now saw, what in the first warmth of composition she had overlooked—how far her work was below her ideal. That evening, as she rose from her writing-table, the school-

mistress had come to her to reveal that a raging fire of jealousy was blazing in the hearts of all the ladies in Wynmouth, because they thought that Miss Midhurst was put before them all at the Sunday-school. Monica quickly settled the matter by declaring, with a laugh, that, if it would please her fair neighbours, she was ready to take the place, not only of the lowest teacher, but of the lowest scholar. By so doing she knew that she should expose herself to be called behind her back, according to the different tastes in invective among the maids and matrons of Wynmouth, an odd person, who was always trying to make herself remarkable by doing or saying something extraordinary—an artful little hypocrite and a designing girl, who wanted to catch Mr. Wilford by making him think her a saint

in humility; but with all this she would gain at least outward peace.

“How strange it seems to me,” she thought, as she stood at the top of the field, where she could feel the fresh sea breeze, and get a view of the waves, each throwing up in turn on the shore its tribute of delicate white foam—“how strange it seems to me that some women can find the interest of their lives in petty jealousies such as these, in putting their drawers tidy, and settling whether they prefer crochet or embroidery! It is no doubt well that many women should busy themselves with trifles, because their domestic lives, as wives and mothers, must be generally made up of them. They only have to take care that the trifles are beautiful and useful, and not empty and distorted. But it is very unfair that she who wants

something more should be looked upon often with mistrust, as if she were a disturber of social laws. The chief point, I think, in which I differ from other women is in looking at things in a broader and more general way. I suppose that makes my character stronger and more man-like; and perhaps that was why, when the other evening an old lady had been talking to me for an hour about her own peculiar headaches and her maid-servants' caps, and I suppressed a few yawns, I heard her whisper to her neighbour, as I went away, 'That is quite a masculine woman.' And yet I am not really at all a masculine woman. I can cry; I can pity; I can sympathise; I think I could love, and I know I could flirt. I wonder whether I have really any talent for writing fiction? What a horrible thing it would be to devote one's

self for some years to one object, thinking it a true vocation, and then to find it was only a conceited fancy! Why can't I give it up, and all thoughts of being different from other, perhaps wiser, girls, and marry Charles Wilford, as any young lady in Wymouth would give all the hair on her head, both real and false, to do. Because I have a poor idea that it would be a higher honour to make the name of Midhurst widely known than to change it for another. Because it goes against my pride that marriage should be the only end and aim of woman's life in this world. Because I know I should not make a good wife for a man with a middling income; for I have no taste for small household cares. Because for Charles Wilford I have no love, as I understand the word—only friendship. He is a good man and a sensible

man ; but, somehow, he is not my dream—my hero—my fairy prince. Poor fellow ! it is very sad to see him now, but he will soon get over it, I daresay, and so will auntie over her ill-humour. If I only knew whether I am a real artist ! I would not give a farthing to be an amateur. Well, time and work will show, I suppose.”

At this point in her thoughts Monica’s attention was attracted by the strange behaviour of the old white pony. He was standing at some little distance from her, with his head down so that his muzzle touched the ground, snorting in that half-frightened, half-inquiring way peculiar to horses when they find or see something that startles them. The gathering twilight kept Monica from distinguishing from where she stood the object which thus excited the pony’s wonder ; but she

was certain it must be something uncommon, for Snowball was always considered an animal of intellect. Though Snowball had lived with Mrs. Penlewin almost ever since Monica could remember anything, his legs were still as fresh as the day he was foaled. Throughout his whole life he, with his small Exmoor head, his bright, determined eye, and his well-rounded barrel, had been going one way, and that way was his own. He had regular rules for every road in the neighbourhood as to where he would walk and where he would trot. If the whip touched his sacred quarters unexpectedly, he was sure to return the insult with a kick. Was there anything in the road before him that he did not quite like the look of? He always walked backward with a most dignified air when an especially sweet, juicy tuft of

grass took his fancy in the hedge as he went along; he waited to ask no leave about taking it, and when he unbent so far as to turn, answering to the rein, he did it in a deliberate way, which showed it to be an act of most gracious condescension.

Monica went towards Snowball, calling him by his name. As she was a favourite of his, he raised his head directly he heard her voice, and looked round at her with a face which said, "Come and see what you can make of this. I hardly think you will be able to cast much light on the subject, for it baffles even my wisdom; but you can try."

Monica did go, and did look, but started backward with a faint cry as she gazed. There lay a human body. Gathering together, however, her courage, she again approached, and bent over the prostrate

form. Snowball drew back and looked at her as if he approved much of her conduct, but thought it arose from the fact of her having been put on his back when she was five years old.

Monica now saw that the inanimate figure before her was that of a shabbily-dressed boy of about nine or ten, with a thin white face. Every feature was so still, and the little hands, as Monica touched them, were so cold that for a few moments she half feared him to be dead ; but she felt for his heart and found it was beating.

Though she wrote fiction, Miss Midhurst could be at times a very practical woman. She chafed the small chill fingers, and held to the child's nose a vinaigrette which hung from her watch chain. The boy slowly came to himself, and lifting his

heavy eyelids fixed upon her a pair of large, bewildered dark eyes. Those eyes looked their way straight to Monica's heart, and made her feel at once interest in and pity for the child.

"Are you an angel sent by mother to fetch me?" he murmured; and little wonder that the still half unconscious boy should have thought so as she leaned over him, with the light of the rising moon shining on her fluttering muslin dress, and her face so full of sweet compassion.

"No, I am a woman who wants to help you and do you good."

"I am so hungry," said the child, sitting up; and as his senses came back more fully, leaping, boy-like, from his first pretty aerial fancy down to his chief bodily want.


"Can you walk?"

"Yes, I hope so."

“Then come with me and you shall have something to eat.”

He rose to his feet with some difficulty, but with Monica's help managed to creep down the field, through Mrs. Penlewin's back-door and into her kitchen. There cook looked at first a little askance at such an unexpected intrusion. As, however, she was in the main a kindly old soul, she soon recovered herself, and helped readily Miss Midhurst to ply the child at intervals with small quantities of food. Before long his healthy young body began to regain tone. When she thought him strong enough to talk, Monica, who, the more she saw him and heard him speak, felt persuaded that this was no common beggar-boy, took him with her into the garden.

“She be a dear kind young lady, with a deal of feeling for poor folk,” said cook to



herself as soon as they were gone; "only she be a little fancical, and I be almost afeared that some day her brain will turn right over in her head, like a pancake, with too much larning."

Meanwhile Monica and the child sat together on a garden bench. She asked him his name, and he told her that it was Armine Marani. Then she questioned him about his past life. Mrs. Penlewin was out, and Armine, thus left alone with his patroness, gathered courage as he looked into her friendly face; and, though at first he spoke rather shyly, soon told his tale simply and well.

The first part of what he said has already been set down in these pages. Of what happened to him after we left him asleep in the barn it is unnecessary to speak at any length. He met with no very


strange or singular adventures ; therefore to follow him minutely in his daily wanderings would be tedious from its sameness.

It suffices to say that he journeyed slowly on, now getting half a day's work in a hay-field, when threatening clouds made all hands needful which could be pressed into the service ; now making a few pence by his carved toys ; now begging if everything else failed ; often hungry, often weary, but never quite despairing.

At length he reached Exeter. There he fell in with a female pedlar, who promised him his keep and a small weekly payment to go with her and carry her box. He consented, but quickly repented of his bargain. Through calls at every public-house she passed, the good lady's day became a sort of tipsy gamut. First she was maudlin, next merry, then she grew abusive—

finally she became actively aggressive, and beat her little companion. The evening before Monica found Armine she had treated him worse than usual, and given him no supper. The boy ran away from her that night, and in the morning found himself very hungry and without a farthing, for his weekly wages had only existed in his mistress's lively fancy. That day he had begged, but with small success.

At length, as evening drew on, he had turned into Mrs. Penlewin's field as a quiet-looking place, and lain down under the hedge, where he had fallen into a kind of stupor from weariness and exhaustion.



CHAPTER XVII.

THE STORM.

THE sun was setting behind one of the vast forests of South America. The broad leaves that crowned the tops of the mighty trees, stirred by the rising breeze, struck together with a drowsy, monotonous sound. Around the huge trunks twined creepers, some delicate as the threads of a lady's hair, some thick enough to make a green chain to bind a giant, some wrapping up the tree so closely in gorgeous blossom, that it looked like a column of blazing crimson or ethe-

real blue. Flowers, various in shape and hue as a poet's dream, gemmed the ground with patches of brilliant colour. Here they ran up into tall spikes fringed with feathery down. Here they drooped in large bells, which seemed fit to hang in some fairy cathedral tower. There a myriad of tiny blooms clustered together till they formed a dainty cushion. Insects with wings, so brightly tinted as to suggest the fancy that some of these same flowers had suddenly flown away from their stems, darted about or poised themselves lazily in the sweet, drowsy air. Now and then a bird on a branch far above showed coquettishly for a moment its crested head or glittering plumage. The warm wind was heavy with a thousand perfumes. A golden shimmer in the distance showed where the stately Amazon rolled along, shining

beneath the rays of the setting sun like a royal road for a chariot race of the gods.

The forest was not quite untrodden by man, as was shown by a few tracks running through it. One of these widens into a sort of clearing, in the middle of which there stood a tent with horses picketed round it, and a few dusky-skinned servants lounging near.

In the door of the tent, wrapped in folds of light gauze, and resting among soft rugs, there reclined a lady. The form was fuller and more womanly than of old, the cheeks were a little paler, and there was a softer light in the eyes, but still it was Stella. Before her stood a good-looking negro woman, holding in her arms a child of about eighteen months old, whose face was like the reflection of Stella's face in a tiny mirror. This was Stella's small wo-

man, whose advent had been hailed in the young mother's heart by such a choir of sweet hopes and merry fancies.

"Come and give mamma another kiss, and leave one for papa, too, before you go," said Stella.


The nurse put down the child, who toddled towards her mother, and with a ripple of baby laughter, threw herself upon the grass at her feet. Then Stella bent over her, and what a game of play they had! How did the child toss up in wild delight, now a little round leg, and now a chubby hand, and how amusingly did Stella's fingers creep about, tickling sometimes the little white neck, and sometimes the soft arms! It was a winsome sight to see those two together. The child was so like some tricky sprite, who was playing with Stella at being Stella.

At length both were tired; the two kisses asked for were given ten-fold. The nurse took up the child; the mother bade her only go a little way up the straight path, and not stay out too long. Then the negress and her charge turned away, and were soon lost to view among the trees.

After they were gone Stella felt a little lonely. She had generally for companions the Frau Professorinn and the two or three other ladies who were with the expedition; but now for some days she and her husband had left the rest of their party, taking a few of the general servants of the expedition with them, and drawn on by Oakleigh's zeal as a naturalist, were making a journey further on into the forest.

"How I should like to see what they are all doing at home!" she thought, taking

up some work that lay beside her ; but, instead of moving the needle, twisting the cotton round her fingers. "What a delightful thing that enchanted tube in the 'Arabian Nights' must have been ! Perhaps, though, after all, if I had it, I might catch my friends doing what they would not exactly wish anyone to see. I might get a view of Miss De Vellembie taking a nap in her study, with her cap on one side ; or of Papa Sparshaw copying from a book a sermon that he will preach as his own next Sunday ; and Monica—dear old Monica !—in what private weakness should I detect her ? Why, I should think it would be sitting with a Hebrew book upside-down in her hand, crying over some faithless lover. How heavy the air is this evening ! It quite weighs down my eyelids ;" and Stella's pretty little mouth was widened into a very large yawn.



Just then a gentleman, with a sun-bronzed English face and broad British shoulders, came out of the forest.

“Oh! Fred, I am so sleepy!” she cried. “I think all the old school geography lessons must have flown over here, and got into the air.”

“You would not feel like that, my dear, if you had a proper taste for natural history,” said he, stretching himself on the ground at her feet. “These flowers are a great deal more interesting than all the novels in all the circulating libraries.”

“As I sit here and watch them I sometimes think that the flowers do really make love to each other. Just look how that tall plant bends over the smaller one close to it. Does it not remind you of the way in which, in a drawing-room, a gentleman bends over the back of his lady’s chair to whisper soft things in her ear?”

"Was that the way we used to make love, Stella?"

"You know as well as I do, sir, that all that sort of thing with us went on in by-places, where no whispering was necessary. I am sure the ladies who live in trees and streams, and whose names I quite forget, though Miss De Vellembie used industriously to hammer them into me, must take particular interest in us, Fred. Our courtship was all in a copse, and by a trout-stream; and our married life has been spent on a river and in a forest."

"I suppose, then, if I had been a troubadour I should have written sonnets about my star shining upon me between green leaves?"

"I am very glad you were not that. A woman must have grown horribly tired

of a man doing nothing but whining sickly verses about her."

"Well, my dear, I am never likely to trouble you in that way. I could not write a line of poetry even on the first day I saw you, though I remember I tried hard. The only thing that could possibly awaken my sleeping muse would be my finding a quite new species of moth."

"I am glad you know what a terribly dull fellow you are, and I hope you feel, too, what an act of grace I did in marrying you. Think what a different life I should have led had I married some gay captain, and gone to half-a-dozen balls a week, with a score of yet gayer captains in my train!"

"Why, then, my star, *did* you marry me?"

"For the same reason, I suppose, the servants at my guardian's used to give

whenever they broke the best china—I could not help it.” And with a laugh which might have been an echo of that of her childhood, it was so free and joyous, she threw her arms around his neck.

The other human members of the little encampment were just then all behind the tent, and there were only an old one-eyed horse piqueted close by, and a little green bird opposite on a branch to see this ridiculous pair of married lovers.

“And I think my star must shine, too, because she can’t help it. Suppose I had married a woman who had cried all day, instead of smiling all day as you do. There is nothing I am so much afraid of as a crying woman.”

“If you find any health in me, it was all dear Monica who put it there. I always feel as if my mind were like a folded sheet

of blank paper, which first she opened, and then painted pictures upon."

"And do you mean to do the same yourself by tiny Stella?"

"Tiny Stella shall not be one of your twining plants, who are always flinging out their arms to find some one to cling to. She shall be brought up with a will of her own, and shall choose everything for herself, from her ribbons to her husband. Nor shall she be a fast miss, whose talk is a good deal more vulgar than the talk of the page, and not half so racy as that of the stable-boy. What fun it will be taking her to her first ball and seeing her flirt! We shall be such a respectable-looking old couple, Fred—you with a bald head, and I in a black velvet up to my chin, and a cap with a prim bow on the top."

"The worst of it is that when your

daughter comes out you will be still frisking about in tarlatan, taking away all her partners. If you wish to act the dowager, you must wait for your grand-daughter."

"Oh! Fred, I should so like to show the darling to all of them at home!" cried Stella, who, since his last words, had sunk into a little reverie. "Won't you soon have seen enough of the flowers and insects here?"

A shadow came over his face.

"Can't you make yourself happy for a year or two longer in this kind of life?" he said. "This country is to me like a wonderful book, of which I have only mastered the first pages. Perhaps," and his voice trembled a little, "you would like to go home before me with the child?"


She was silent for some moments, while she swallowed down what was rather like a

sob, for she had been dwelling a little too much that afternoon on dear old home memories, and while she listened to the waving tree-tops, which had taken up the song of the river long ago, and were chanting, "Little Stella, little Stella, love him truly, little Stella," drowning triumphantly the voice of a wicked spirit which had been whispering that he cared less for her than he did for his profession. Then she spoke out cheerfully,

"Stay here as long as you find great and good work to do, dearest. I and the child will stay with you, and I shall be happy—and more than happy."

"Stella, my brave Stella!" and his grateful eyes said much more than his words. They were both silent for a little after that.

"But where is tiny Stella?" he asked at length.



"She and Rhoda are gone for their evening walk. I hope they will soon be back, for I fancy a storm must be coming."

There seemed, indeed, a likelihood of Stella's words coming true. In the west, above the gorgeous cloud pavilion lately left by the sun, there was an ominous black streak. The wind now swelled up and moaned through the forest, and now died away into solemn stillness, amid which nothing could be heard, except the shrill cry of some distant bird. The whole air felt as if a wizard had just passed that way, scattering drowsy spells as he went.

Stella rose, and walking to the beginning of the path along which the nurse and child had gone, looked anxiously up it.

"I wish they would come," she said, nervously. "I think I will go to look for them."

“No, Stella, no!” cried Oakleigh, hurriedly. “We will send one of the men.”

His eye, always quick to read the signs of nature, made him suspect what was coming more readily than she did. In truth, they had hardly told one of the servants to go in search of the nurse and child, when, with all the suddenness of that climate, where shadow follows sunshine as swiftly as word follows thought, the storm was upon them.

That black streak in the west had now overspread the whole sky with one dense funeral pall. The wind rose in a moment with the strength of a hurricane, and rushed through the forest, making the tops of the highest trees bow humbly, tearing off the creepers that wrapped their trunks, and tossing them wildly about, so that they fluttered abroad, like

the threads of some brightly-tinted web which had been rent asunder, crushing to the earth the long grass and taller flowers. The thunder came up in one long roll, growing each instant louder and louder, like the notes in some awful celestial gamut, until at last it burst overhead in one terrific crash, which seemed to shake the mighty forest from end to end. The lightning twisted itself in and out among the branches, and played around the leaves, making them glisten weirdly, and darted up and down the trunks, so that many of the large trees appeared wrapped in fire. The rain poured down, as if all heaven were dissolved in one vast cataract.

It was a terrible place to be in in such a storm, and even Oakleigh's stout English heart quailed, but his presence of mind did not forsake him. He laid a firm hand on

his wife, who was hurrying towards the tent in a blind instinct of seeking shelter, for he knew it would most likely be blown down. He wrapped her in the thickest of the rugs she had lately been lying upon. He drew her into the middle of the open space, as far as possible from the trees. Then he clasped her close to him, and prayed silently.

On roared the thunder, on raged the wind, on rattled the rain, on blazed the lightning; but above the fearful din of the storm was heard the wild cry of the mother—"My child! my child!—O God, save her!"

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

